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Brecht and China: A Mutual Response

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Abstract

This thesis deals with the cross-cultural relations between Brecht and China through an analysis of how Brecht responded to the traditional Chinese theatre and how his drama was received in turn by modern Chinese theatre. It attempts to examine the respective socio-cultural or political contexts wherein such kind of cross-cultural contacts were needed, and the consequent aesthetic-theatrical as well as socio-cultural or political changes brought about by these contacts that have produced two distinctively independent yet related forms of theatre.

It is argued that Brecht's search for a theatre style of his own amidst the socio-cultural as well as political crises between the two world wars made him look to the East for inspirations, and his direct encounter with Mei Lanfang enabled him to interpret the latter's acting in such a way that he responded to it with his postulation of the alienation effect and modification of a gestic performance style. His repudiation of the well-made dramatic theatre brought his epic theatre closer to the traditional Chinese theatre whose aesthetic principles he shared in constructing a non-Aristotelian episodic form of drama. In his experimentations with new modes of theatrical expressions, he did not simply borrow or copy the forms and content of classical Chinese drama; he appropriated, transformed and renewed them, for example, in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, for the particular purpose of instructing audiences in a scientific age.

China's reception of Brecht has had much to do with the country's changing socio-cultural as well as political situations. Chinese theatre practitioners responded to him because he was a politically, culturally and aesthetically suitable figure. His epic drama provided an alternative style for the Chinese in their attempt to innovate their realist spoken drama imported from the West, and was also introduced into local forms of performing arts in hope that the traditional Chinese theatre could be resurrected. Furthermore, he prompted Huang Zuolin to theoretically re-examine Chinese operas, which the latter integrated with techniques of Brecht and Stanislavsky into spoken drama to establish a new theatre style called *Xiyei* drama.

Introduction

The modern world has witnessed great achievements in science and technology which have made time and space diminish to a high degree. Human beings are no longer confined within national or cultural boundaries. We are equally affected by events occurring thousands of miles away as well as at home. The telescoping of our vast world into a close neighbourhood increasingly stimulates communication in different civilizations and facilitates more and more exchanges of ideas, skills and cultures, benefiting all the parties involved.

The history of Western indebtedness to Eastern culture, and vice versa, is too vast to be examined in detail here. However, in respect of the recent interactions between Eastern and Western cultures, the relationship between Brecht and China constitutes a very interesting phenomenon in cross-cultural studies. About half a century ago, Brecht appropriated Chinese plots for his dramas and drew on traditional Chinese operatic principles to formulate his dramatic theories. Now, he appears to be exercising influence back on Chinese theatre (both traditional theatre and Western-type spoken theatre), particularly on Huang Zuolin and his *Xieyi* drama. This kind of cross-cultural exchange involving mutual influence and assimilation blurs to a large extent the clear-cut boundaries between "emitters" and "receivers" of the old school comparatists. It is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, in examining the relationship between Brecht and China, to determine which cultural tradition evoked in either Brecht's epic theatre or Huang's *Xieyi* drama is the "emitter" and which is the "receiver." Did the traditional Chinese theatre influence the West by means of Brecht's theories, which as Brecht himself admitted, were derived in some sense from Chinese sources? In that case, Chinese theories of drama made a detour through Western cultural traditions only to come back to China to exert influence on modern Chinese theatre. Or did Brecht (and also Stanislavsky) influence Huang Zuolin, who, in turn, found in the West that which had been lost in contemporary Chinese theatre

arts? Or is it, more simply, the case that Huang reached back into his own national traditions to create his dramaturgy? To raise these questions is to see that it is impossible simply to posit the "presence of two distinct and therefore comparable entities."¹

Nor does it seem useful to refer to the theoretical concepts and vocabulary of translation to describe and assess the circular pattern of Brecht-China relationship, which would suggest mutual efforts towards re-creating a theatre tradition marked by candid theatricality, for each effected the shifts in perception through affirmation of a distinctive cultural identity or theatre style. The differentiations between source text and target text, or source culture and target culture, do not exist here. They are one and the same thing. The cross-cultural contact between Brecht and Chinese theatre stemmed from their respective needs and the demands of their own particular cultural or theatre traditions. According to the relevance of the situation in question, they both borrowed, transformed and re-planted the same "foreign text" or the same elements of theatre tradition that had been either long forgotten or damaged.

Brecht's theatre, among others, broke away from the convention harboured in the West from the Renaissance to the late nineteenth century that stage actions and events were a replica of those in real life, and tried to historicize and externalize behaviour after finding a living example in the age-old Chinese dramaturgy. What is more, in his march towards a re-creation of an anti-illusionistic and presentational theatre style, he was met half-way and joined by modern Chinese theatre practitioners who, dissatisfied with the quality of the realist theatre imported from the West, not only turned to his epic drama for new ideas, but also started to revitalize their own native operas by integrating elements of disparate traditions. Thus, the relationship between Brecht and China reflects a mutual cross-cultural interaction striving for a reconciliation of the polarities of realism and theatricalism, a re-creation in a

¹ Ulrich Weisstein, *Comparative Literature and Literary Theory: Survey and Introduction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), p.29

scientific age of an ancient, similar theatre tradition that can be more readily shared by all peoples of the world.

Existing scholarship on the relationship between Brecht and China appears to have overlooked the mutual interaction benefiting the two parties. Critics tend to deal with Chinese influence upon Brecht or vice versa as individual cases. For example, Antony Tatlow's *The Mask of Evil* (1977) discusses Brecht's relationship with China in terms of the impact not only of Chinese theatre, but also of Chinese poetry and philosophy as well. Due to the attention which he also pays to the role of Japanese theatre and poetry, Antony Tatlow's account of the traditional Chinese theatre's impact upon Brecht appears to be focused only on its formal structure and plot structure, which he believes offered Brecht a model or an example. As to the all-important concept of the alienation effect, the narrative device of storyteller and chorus, and externalizing acting style, he believes that Brecht was more influenced by the Japanese than the Chinese, as Brecht's interest in Chinese theatre, to him, was "personal" and "idiosyncratic," and came later than his interest in Japanese forms which "was part of a wider European process."² Renata Berg-Pam's *Bertolt Brecht and China* (1979) is a chronological description of the influences of Chinese philosophies, drama and poetry, starting from the beginnings of sinology and chinoiserie in Germany at the turn of the century to Brecht's unrevised *Turandot* (1967), with more emphasis laid on Brecht's response to the ancient Chinese philosophers and poets.³

Other critics focus their attention on the impact of Brecht on Chinese theatre. For example, in "Brecht in Asia - The Chinese Contribution" (1982), Wolfram Schlenker views the success of *Life of Galileo*, jointly directed by Huang Zuolin and

² See Antony Tatlow, *The Mask of Evil* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1977), pp.326-329

³ Renata Berg-Pam devotes less than two chapters out of the ten in her book to the study of Brecht's relationship with Chinese theatre, describing according to the time sequence Brecht's contact with Mei Lanfang's acting, the derivation of the alienation effect and his composition of "Chinese" plays such as *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *The Good Person of Szechuan*, *Turandot* and so on. See Renata Berg-Pam, *Bertolt Brecht and China* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1979), pp.158-218

Chen Yong in 1979, as of "unusual" significance for the development of Chinese theatre. However, upon an examination of its socio-cultural characteristics, he expresses a negative opinion of the role which Brecht played in a possible union of the traditional Chinese theatre and Western-type spoken theatre to create a new theatre of China's own.⁴ In comparison with Schlenker, Adrian Hsia appears more optimistic. In his "Bertolt Brecht in China and His Impact on Chinese Drama: A Preliminary Examination" (1983), the first comprehensive Western scholarship on the subject of Chinese reception of Brecht starting from the early 1950s when Brecht's epic drama was utilized by Huang Zuolin in his production of *The Living Newspaper of the Resist-U.S.-and-Assist-Korea Campaign* (1951) until Huang's second, successful attempt at directing Brecht's plays, i.e. *Life of Galileo* in 1979, Adrian Hsia views Huang's dramas as experimentations heading towards an "Imagistic Theatre," particularly in connection with Brecht's influence in China. Although he is not sure about the term "Imagistic Theatre" which he coined for the Chinese *Xieyi*, the ongoing discussions about the hope "to unite the Brechtian Theatre with the Stanislavskian School and the Chinese Opera," he believes, "will lead to the establishment of a 'New Chinese Drama.'"⁵

Unlike the above critics who treat the cross-cultural relations between Brecht and China either as a case of the traditional Chinese theatre's effect upon Brecht or Brecht's impact upon Chinese theatre respectively, this thesis deals with the relationship in terms of bilateral cultural interactions. This approach is determined by

⁴ Based on his understanding of the "plebian" character of Chinese theatre and the accustomed audience response as well as the current cultural policy in China, Schlenker doubts the possibility of the creation of an integrated theatre of different theatre traditions in China, saying that such an idea is "like a phantom" which has been haunting discussions for a long time," and "not yet really materialized in any practical form." See Wolfram Schlenker, "Brecht in Asia - The Chinese Contribution", in *Brecht and East Asian Theatre: The Proceedings of a Conference on Brecht in East Asian Theatre*, ed. by Antony Tatlow and Tak-Wai Wong (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1982), pp.186-207 (pp.193-201)

⁵ See Adrian Hsia, "Bertolt Brecht in China and His Impact on Chinese Drama: A Preliminary Examination", *Comparative Literature Studies*, 20 (1983), 231-245 (pp.244-245)

the particular relationship between Brecht and Chinese theatre practitioners who were both involved in an inextricably intertwined process of mutual influence and assimilation.

"Brecht and China: A Mutual Response" suggests several overlapping areas of investigation, including how Brecht responded to the traditional Chinese theatre as a living example for his theory and practice of theatre, how Chinese theatre practitioners responded to his dramaturgy as an alternative means of making changes to their modern spoken theatre and resurrecting their traditional forms of theatre, how such a mutual response related to their respective socio-cultural needs as well as aesthetic demands, how it led to modification or establishment of distinctive yet also resembling theatre styles, and finally how it can be assessed in view of cultural interaction on an international scale. All these issues cannot be separated in a study of Brecht-China relations.

Although one of its purposes is comparative, this thesis does not seek to refer to the readily asserted terms of comparison or translation. If we label everything as "influence," we simply side-step the issues; this does not lead to critical understanding. Brecht may have borrowed from Chinese dramaturgy, including forms and content as well as performance style, but he adapted it, often changing it beyond recognition. Similarly, Huang Zuolin may have also adopted Brechtian dramaturgy, but he subjected it to a complex process of appropriation and assimilation, out of which emerged a unique style of his own. I do not imply that the original sources were irrelevant here, but a detailed textual examination is likely to reveal more dissimilarities. By looking at the relationship between Brecht and Chinese theatre as a mutual cross-cultural interaction, this thesis proposes the concept of creative response as shown by theatre artists towards the introduction of foreign theatrical elements that they set out to incorporate. In this way, a comparison is set against a larger background wherein disparate theatre traditions are brought together to test and re-think each other's values according to the particular socio-cultural as well as aesthetic needs. It is a process of cultural transfer or transformation, out of which is rendered a

new form of drama fusing elements of different theatre traditions, thus similar yet still independent. During such a process, the participating theatre artists do not merely function as mediators between their own native theatre and the foreign theatre form(s) they are adopting. They respond to the foreign elements in order to accomplish their particular purposes. They are in search of a new form. Although by proceeding in this manner, they still introduce some aspects of the cultural tradition they adapt, "influence" becomes a much less absolute and tangible concept when we consider a more significant re-creation.

As Susan Bassnett reminds us,

Today, comparative literature in one sense is dead. The narrowness of the binary distinction, the unhelpfulness of the ahistorical approach, the complacent shortsightedness of the Literature-as-universal-civilizing-force approach have all contributed to its demise. But it lives on under other guises: in the radical reassessment of Western cultural models at present being undertaken in many parts of the world, in the transcendence of disciplinary boundaries through new methodological insights, [...] in the examination of the processes of intercultural transfer.⁶

Susan Bassnett's suggestion proposes a new cross-cultural approach in the current agenda of comparative literature. When we examine Brecht as a model for modern Chinese theatre, we have to take into account his indebtedness to the traditional Chinese dramaturgy. Likewise, in a study of Brecht's response to Mei Lanfang's acting, we also have to consider the recent response from China. This is a process of intercultural transfer which is completed in an entire circular pattern. Examining such a process requires new methodological insights, for conventional disciplinary boundaries apparently cease to apply here any more.

I do not attempt to suggest that my study offers new methodological insights for comparative literature. What I intend to do is to apply some of the currently

⁶ Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p.47

available ones so that we can have a critical understanding of the Brecht-China phenomenon.

Erika Fischer-Lichte says:

The adoption and use of elements of foreign theatre traditions has a very specifically defined task to fulfil in each culture, and [...] is determined by various historical and social situations. It can be related on one hand to the aesthetics of theatre, and on the other to the social functions of theatre.⁷

Fischer-Lichte's comment suggests a method of procedure which happens to fit the study of the mutual response of Brecht and China to each other, as such a response was both aesthetic and theatrical, and had specific socio-cultural functions in both cases.

Brecht's response to Chinese theatre opens a vista onto cross-currents and affinities within the arts and across nations in the inter-war period. It is to be viewed not only in the context of the German theatre tradition to which Brecht was inextricably related, but also in the broader context of the playwright's artistic and intellectual contacts particularly in the 1930s, if we hope to distinguish his epic style of drama from its apparent sources of influence. Brecht started his dramatic career shortly after the First World War which ushered in a period of history marked by political, economic and social instability. Whereas the German intellectuals' heroic idealism was completely shattered by their country's defeat in the war, and then by the short-lived Revolution that showed a glimpse of hope for democracy and socialism, they launched a series of radical experiments with new forms and styles on the stage as a reflection of the contemporary political and economic crises, for they found that the existing form of the theatre could no longer meet the needs of the particular social situations in question. Apart from Dadaism, Futurism and so on that were also active

⁷ Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Theatre, Own and Foreign: The Intercultural Trend in Contemporary Theatre", in *The Dramatic Touch of Difference: Theatre, Own and Foreign*, ed. by Erika Fischer-Lichte and others (Tübingen: Narr Verlag, 1990), pp.11-19 (p.17)

during that period, Brecht was, to start with, related to Expressionism and political theatre, the two most predominant theatre movements at the time. Yet as a both politically and aesthetically conscious artist, he was in a constant search of a style of his own in order to best instruct the audience in a scientific age. His experiment with epic drama, under the influence of Piscator in particular, and his connection with the Russian left-wing avant-gardists, brought him to realize that, among all the different forms and ideas that were on trial in his theatre, the most suitable one for his particular social purpose was the epic, story-telling kind of acting style of Chinese theatre, which he was going to integrate with elements of Western theatre tradition. Hence, both as a reaction against the decadent, bourgeois Western theatre and the well-made drama governed by Aristotelian norms, and as a continuation of the classical European theatre tradition, Brecht responded to what he interpreted as coldness in Mei Lanfang's acting with the alienation effect, and Mei's reliance on stylized gestural conventions to externalize inner feelings was transported into a gestic performance style, which also led to the embodiment of the basic gest in the temporally progressive episodic scenes of his drama. Although such a non-Aristotelian form of structure, reminiscent of that in classical Chinese dramas and also related to the agit-prop theatre that was characterized by the simplicity of structure and form, and montage, was viewed as "formalist" by the Russian "socialist realists," Brecht never renounced his experiments with new forms and techniques. He further incorporated them into parables, an old genre of writing whose explicit theatricality allowed him the freedom to dialectically treat the characters portrayed. Such an experiment with old and new forms and techniques was brought into a harmonious union in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, a story of ancient human wisdom which he borrowed from China but transformed and renewed with a modern social meaning, as an expression of his Utopian idealism towards the end of the Second World War.

On the other hand, the Chinese introduction of Brecht was closely related to the country's need to reform its Western-type spoken theatre, which still clung to the

Aristotelian norms as well as the Stanislavskian school, and to revive its traditional operatic art forms, which were damaged during the Great Cultural Revolution. Brecht was finally accepted in China after the end of the Great Cultural Revolution when the success of *Life of Galileo* indicated the country's longing for advanced science and technology as well as freedom. The growing interest in him led to transplantations of his plays into local forms of performing arts, indicating Chinese theatre practitioners' hope to resurrect their native theatre by introducing Brecht into its existing repertoire. Huang Zuolin, who called on his compatriots to experiment with more theatre forms in the early 1960s, re-examined Chinese operas under the impetus of Brecht and postulated *Xieyi* drama, a new theatre style integrating techniques of Mei Lanfang, Brecht and Stanislavsky.

To argue that the cultural interaction between Brecht and China effected aesthetic-theatrical as well as socio-cultural or political changes in both parties involved is to set their mutual response to each other not only against their respective theatre traditions and situations, but also the body of their works that arose independently out of them. Therefore, this thesis does not aim at only presenting evidence of the effect of Chinese operas upon Brecht or documenting his presence in modern Chinese theatre. It seeks to tackle the issue of creative integration of disparate theatre traditions which renders possible the cultural transformation of theatre traditions. Through describing the processes through which both Brecht and Chinese theatre practitioners drew upon each other in their respective theatrical innovations, it also tries to suggest reasons for the aesthetic-theatrical as well as socio-cultural changes effected when two or more different theatre traditions were brought together. This process may be exemplified by 1) Brecht's postulation of the alienation effect, his evolving theory of the concept of empathy and innovative performance style, based on his observation of Mei Lanfang, 2) his response to the formal structure of Chinese drama as a return to the mainstream of the classical European theatre tradition, 3) his response to the thematic structure of Chinese drama as a reflection of his state of mind and as a model for achieving harmony between form and content in

his epic theatre, 4) how he was accepted in China as a socio-cultural and political force of reformation to break through the dominance of the Stanislavskian method of acting and express the suppressed feelings about the Great Cultural Revolution, 5) how his plays were staged in local forms of performing arts as a means of facilitating a revival of the traditional Chinese theatre, and 6) how and why Brecht enabled Chinese theatre practitioners to re-examine their traditional operatic arts and how his dramaturgy was integrated into modern spoken drama to create a new theatre of China's own.

I may seem to be oversimplifying a long and complex process of cultural interaction between Brecht and Chinese theatre, but I consider it essential to be judiciously selective. With no intention of compiling a catalogue of points of contact nor a thesaurus of sources, I have selected statements from a relatively narrow band in the critical spectrum which I consider are relevant to the evidence presented for my conclusions when such evidence is not readily available. Certain issues, such as those dealt with by the afore-mentioned critics, have persisted in the discourse on the Brecht-China relationship, and have become essentially unquestioned assumptions. Thus, wherever it is possible, I consider it necessary to re-address them in this thesis, incorporating them into the line of my argument.

The present topic was also determined by the way I analyzed and selected the materials collected during a special trip which I made back to China in early 1993. I travelled to Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu and some other cities, where I not only collected a large amount of books and articles, but also had talks and interviews with some of those who were involved in staging Brecht's plays, the most fruitful one among which was with Huang Zuolin himself in Shanghai. After examining, comparing and assessing the data, I decided to give up topics which I was also considering at the time, including Mei Lanfang's female personification and Brecht's characterization of women, how the first China-Brecht Symposium was conducted and how his plays were staged on that occasion, and how other playwrights and

directors, apart from Huang, responded to Brecht's dramaturgy, choosing instead to balance and concentrated on the present issues in the thesis.

Chapter I The Alienation Effect: Its Development and Comparison with Mei Lanfang's Theatre

Brecht's formal employment of the terminology *Verfremdungseffekt* did not appear until he witnessed Mei Lanfang's demonstration of traditional Chinese theatre arts in Spring, 1935, after which he wrote two essays, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting" (1936) and "On the theatre of the Chinese" (1940). It was repeated and expounded in several of his other important essays, such as "The Street Scene" (1938), "On Experimental Theatre" (1939), "Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect" (1940), and "A Short Organum for the Theatre" (1948). Chinese theatre is repeatedly referred to as corroborative instance in these essays, which are interspersed with sentences like "traditional Chinese acting also knows the alienation effect, and applies it most subtly," "the theatre of past periods also, technically speaking, achieved results with alienation effects---for instance the Chinese theatre," "a masterly use of gesture can be seen in Chinese acting. The Chinese actor achieves the A-effect by being seen to observe his own movements," and "the Asiatic theatre even today uses musical and pantomimic A-effects."¹ Judging by the tone and the content of these essays, particularly "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting" which is resonant with his admiration for Mei Lanfang, Brecht's response to the dramatic expression in Moscow resembles that of a man happy to have found a new friend who holds the same views about society and mankind.

However, Brecht seemed to have offered an unanswerable denial of Chinese influence when he stated that the alienation effect in his theatre was developed quite

¹ Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. & trans. by John Willett (London: Eyre Methuen, 1964; 2nd imp. 1973), p.91, p.135, p.139, p.192

independently of the Asiatic art of acting.² This may have provided a cue for those critics who have been led to believe that Brecht had fully developed his theory before his sojourn in Moscow in 1935.³ However, with respect to Brecht's idea of "originality" which enabled him to borrow and adapt from a great variety of sources, many critics have also tried to suggest the sources of influences which Brecht may have received in formulating his theory of the alienation effect. To name a few, Frederic Ewen also speculates upon the likelihood of the role which Denis Diderot's *Paradox of Acting*, written in the 1770s, played upon Brecht.⁴ Antony Tatlow attempts to associate the alienation effect with Japanese theatre, the *nō* and the *kabuki*, in an analogous fashion.⁵ John Willett's belief that Brecht derived the theory from the Russian formalists appears to have been followed up by other critics such as

² Brecht says: "The experiments conducted by the modern German theatre led to a wholly independent development of the A-effect. So far Asiatic acting has exerted no influence." See Bertolt Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting", in *Brecht on Theatre*, pp.91-99 (p.96)

³ For instance, Peter Brooker takes up Walter Benjamin's idea in this respect in Chapter 4 of his *Bertolt Brecht: Dialectics, Poetry and Politics* (London: Croom Helm, 1988); Frederic Ewen holds the same opinion in his *Bertolt Brecht: His Life, His Art and His Times* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1970), p.225

⁴ Apart from sharing the idea that Brecht developed his alienation theory independently, Frederic Ewen also suggests that Diderot's comment on the symbolic engravings of children's sports is of particular relevance to Brecht's alienating process in which a person views himself from an outside angle. See Frederic Ewen, *Bertolt Brecht: His Life, His Art and His Times*, p.225

⁵ See Antony Tatlow, *The Mask of Evil*, pp.221-254

Katherine Bliss Eaton and Josette Féral,⁶ and attempts have also been made to examine Brecht's indebtedness to Hegel and Marxism.⁷

I am not trying to argue here that Brecht's development of the alienation effect was totally a result of Chinese influence, as there is hardly any evidence showing that Brecht borrowed any particular acting techniques or patterns of gesture from Chinese operas. "Influence" from foreign theatre traditions upon Brecht's theatre does not show itself as something obvious, absolute and direct. In order to prove that he was indeed "influenced" by any particular foreign source, we should perhaps view it in terms of a less obviously tangible, but no less meaningful, creative response which he made towards it. Such a response may have led to a modification of his aesthetic-theatrical principles in relation to the particular social and political situations of his time.

Brecht started his dramatic career in the wake of the First World War which resulted in a series of drastic economic, political and social changes in his country. The sudden collapse of the Prussian régime, brought by the November Revolution, 1918, ushered in a new, hopefully democratic Weimar Republic. Although it lasted precariously throughout the 1920s before Hitler's Nazi movement gained enough support, chiefly from the bureaucratic, judiciary, industrial and military foundations of the defeated Empire of Wilhelm II that were not removed after the Revolution, to

⁶ The main idea here is that Brecht acquainted himself with Victor Shklovsky's concept of "ostranenie" or "device of making it strange" through Tretiakov. See John Willett, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht: A Study from Eight Aspects* (London: Methuen, 1959; 3rd rev. edn, 1967), p.178, pp.206-212; and Katherine Bliss Eaton, *The Theatre of Meyerhold and Brecht* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1985), pp.20-24

Josette Féral explains the alienation effects in linguistic terms of foregrounding, signifieds, discourses and so on in relation to the Russian formalists of the Prague School. See Josette Féral, "Alienation Theory in Multi-Media Performance", *Theatre Journal*, 39 (1987), 461-472 (pp.463-471)

⁷ Peter Brooker believes there is an echo, if not direct derivation from Marxism. See Peter Brooker, "Key Words in Brecht's Theory and Practice of Theatre", in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, ed. by Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.185-200 (p.193)

seize the power in 1933 for a militaristic revival, it represented an age that not only saw Germany become a fully industrialized country by 1919, but also sought to address issues of liberalization and democratization, previously unquestioned during the rapid process of industrial modernization which characterized the pre-war Empire.⁸

Such particular historical situations found expression in German theatre with its noticeable rejection of tradition. While the accelerated technological advance and social change made the theatre seem outmoded,⁹ the defeat in the war and especially the devastating effect of the war on human civilization, alienated German intellectuals who gave up their previous heroic idealism as the country's old cultural values and traditions became discredited. They were brought to realize the unbridgeable gap between art and reality revealed by the disappearance of old social order, and the inadequacy of traditional artistic responses not only to the brutalization of individual by the machinery of mass destruction, but also to the new age that hastened the introduction of a more sophisticated concern for man and society, influenced by the advent of Freudian and Jungian psychology, Nietzschean philosophy, and Marxism in the first few decades of the century.

Although shortly after the Revolution agit-prop theatre groups (such as mass spectacles, speech choruses of workers' organizations, Piscator's Proletarian Theatre and Red Revues) mushroomed to inspire mass cultural events, celebrating collective

⁸ Dick Geary, "Brecht's Germany", in *Brecht in Perspective*, ed. by Graham Bartram and Anthony Waine (London: Longman, 1982), pp.2-10 (pp.3-4)

⁹ Although the *Freie Bühne* (Free Theatre) of Berlin was established in 1889 under the directorship of Otto Brahm and was followed by the *Freie Volksbühne* (Free Theatre of the People) in 1890, offering the working class the opportunity to participate in a culture from which they had hitherto been excluded, during the Empire there had been three pre-dominant types of theatre: the *Hoftheater* or court theatres, a visit to which was regarded as more a social than cultural occasion; the *Stadttheater* or municipal theatres, which were held as places of entertainment rather than of culture; and the privately owned theatres which offered light comedy, melodrama and operettas to suit the trivial taste of the bourgeoisie. See Michael Patterson, *The Revolution in German Theatre 1900-1933* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp.24-26

revolutionary spirit and propagating science and knowledge of the new age, or socialism, in the proletariat against bourgeois culture and ideology, the theatre movement holding sway on the mainstream German stage in the late 1910s and early 1920s was Expressionism which had already started before the war as part of a wider European movement in the arts against the Naturalism and Impressionism of the preceding decades. However, unlike the agit-prop theatre practitioners, in reaction against social conditions, the post-war Expressionists did not contemplate solutions in political change. Their scepticism and ever more acute sense of alienation and disillusionment, as a result of the political life to which they were drawn without seeing its success,¹⁰ prompted them to continue to concern themselves with the society of the day and seek renewal not in mass movements but within the individual. Therefore, their drama presented, through actions which usually highlight isolated "stations" in the characters' inner development in symbolic fashion, protagonists as personifications of ideas, emotions or typical modes of human existence, frequently described by generic abstractions rather than individual names, and often ending in the notorious, passionately inarticulate primitive *Schrei* (cry).¹¹

¹⁰ John Willett relates that the young Ernst Toller, who was gaoled in 1919 together with Erich Mühsam, was attracted to the Independent Socialists or USPD who later broke away to form a separate parliamentary party; other were drawn to the Spartacus Union who believed, like the Russian Bolsheviks, that the war would be ended by the working class seizing power. The main Socialist party or SPD opposed every left-wing attempt to seize power. Therefore, the Spartacist rising in Berlin was doomed to fail. See John Willett, *The Theatre of Erwin Piscator: Half a Century of Politics in the Theatre* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1978), p.40

¹¹ Ladislaus Lob, "German Drama before Brecht: From Neo-Classicism to Expressionism", in *Brecht in Perspective*, pp.11-29 (p.26). For the need stressed, as well as theory and practice, by the post-war German Expressionists in their experimentations with abstractionist theatre and primitivist theatre, see Michael Patterson, *The Revolution in German Theatre*, chapters 2-4. For example, Theodor Däubler asserted in 1919: "to return to the beast through art is our commitment to Expressionism" (p.56). The abstractionist Kaiser, on the other hand, was particularly aware of the need to moderate the primitive *Schrei* in order to give it form: "Cool speech rolls towards passionate agitation—the molten must become rigid in form---and the harder and colder the language, the more turbulent and moving the emotion will be" (p.57). Jessner, whose abstractionist style carried Expressionism to the high point,

Expressionist dramas enjoyed their theatrical hey-day in the first years of the new Republic. However, as the post-war Germany was beset by rampant inflation, unemployment and black-marketeering, the visionary pathos of this type of Expressionism soon came to appear increasingly irrelevant to the day-to-day problems of sheer survival. Plays glorifying the individual and idealizing the creative personality, disclosing and reproducing his secret and hidden states of mind, began to lose its appeal. Brecht, who launched his dramatic career amidst the Expressionist movement, unavoidably retained certain distinctive features of the movement despite some critics' claim that he was never identified with the movement either in an aesthetic or a political sense.¹² Rejecting Expressionism as he might have been, he was also quick to see the positive features of this new revolutionary drama for a scientific age. It is true that *Baal* (1918) was written as much in reaction against the bourgeois cult of the hero's life as against Hanns Johst's Expressionist play *The Lonely One* or *The Soldier*, and *Drums in the Night* (1918) was produced (in 1922), with its abstractionist set and red moon, to represent the "Expressionist" moods of hysteria that had seized Germany in the wake of the war and also to reflect the trend away from Expressionism to what became known as the New Sobriety. Yet both plays are of significance in terms of the relations between Expressionism and Brecht's later development of epic theatre. In conceiving Baal as a larger-than-life, mythical figure, he was indebted to the Expressionists' break with naturalistic theatrical methods, their view of the stage as a spiritual or intellectual space, and license of overstepping the limits of psychological probability, in a loosely constructed traditional plot which is united by an "open," episodic structure of twenty-two scenes. This is an early example

believed that the earlier theatre form was awkward, its thinking contorted and ramified, argued that the theatre today must "free itself from the autocracy of detail, to present the writer's work and its effects in the purest, most convincing and deliberate form," and force the spectator "to concentrate...by seeking the strongest effect in simplicity of form" (p.88).

¹² See, for example, Graham Bartram, "Literature and Commitment", in *Brecht in Perspective*, pp.83-106 (pp.97-98), where *Baal* and the withdrawal of the anti-hero in *Drums in the Night* from revolutionary activity into private life are described as a parody of Expressionism.

of a "theatre for the scientific age" which Brecht was to conceive later. *Drums in the Night*, on the other hand, was cast in the familiar five-act form, and had a conventional love triangle for its plot, was not a return to realism. Its explicit theatricality through the interruption of action (the audience was addressed directly), and the introduction of placards carrying authorial commentary, represented Brecht's disavowal of the sentimental and conventional features. It was an early exercise of the playwright in using the resources of drama and stage to manipulate the responses of the audience, and was thus an important part of Brecht's theatrical apprenticeship.¹³

Although Expressionism declined in the early 1920s, it was characterized by the great wealth of material and great diversity of style and subject-matter which it produced. In view of this, its best embodiment was perhaps Max Reinhardt whose eclecticism included his continued experimentations with Expressionist drama until the Nazi party banned it as decadent and dangerous, and confiscated his theatres in Berlin in 1933. He was a master with chamber plays, immense spectacles, avant-garde exercise, operas and operettas, and the classics of both contemporary and antique repertory. Renowned for his vast spectacles, which were staged in arenas, squares, streets, by lakes and cathedrals, and even on mountainsides, it was Reinhardt's avowed intention that his theatre would contain modern life as once the great arena had contained the Greek community, to recapture that fusion of actor and spectator which had belonged to the classical Greek theatre.¹⁴ In reaching out for vast audiences, he rejected the conventionally realistic stage and searched for new, expressive and emphatic ways of visual and aural, scenic and musical representation which led him directly to experiment with ways of mixing the theatre arts, including repeated testing of such devices as spotlighting, cyclorama and revolving stage.

¹³ Ronald Speirs, *Bertolt Brecht* (London: Macmillan, 1987), pp.21-22; pp.24-26

¹⁴ James Roose-Evans, *Experimental Theatre: From Stanislavsky to Peter Brook* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p.63. Reinhardt insisted that the medium for drama was man himself. He wrote in 1924: "Today and for all time, man must stand at the centre of the whole art of the theatre, man as actor." Quoted from J. L. Styan, *Max Reinhardt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p.16

The apolitical Reinhardt, however, was overtaken in the general advance of the modern German theatre by his politically committed juniors, Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht, who had both worked as *dramaturg* at his Deutsches Theatre and whose innovations in the theatre were more directly related to the economical, cultural and political situations of the age in question. Unlike Reinhardt, both Piscator and Brecht shared a theatre aesthetic appropriate to a less middle-class, more politically conscious, audience.¹⁵

Piscator, who served in the war and participated in the November Revolution, was a Marxist (perhaps in the sense that he joined the Communist party). Although he was related to the Expressionist theatre with his productions in which he made extensive use of elaborate and expensive machinery including revolve, lift, conveyor belt or escalator, cantilever bridge, motor bikes, searchlights, and so on, he made it clear from the beginning of his directorial career that his theatre was politically radical, devised to actively involve the audience in the current social affairs. Subordinating art to political propaganda,¹⁶ he pleaded, in the program of his Proletarian Theatre in 1919, for a "tendentious drama" through which enlightenment, knowledge, and comprehension were to be communicated. His Proletarian Theatre having failed in 1921 due to the authority's refusal to renew the license, Piscator began to try his hand on "direct action" in the theatre on the occasion of the staging of the revue *Red Rumble* before the Reichstag elections of 1924. He began to demand a "revolutionary professional theatre" which was to remove the demarcation between audience and stage through the stage action and also by staging the masses.¹⁷

¹⁵ J. L. Styan, *Max Reinhardt*, p.6

¹⁶ Piscator announced: "We banned the word *art* radically from our programme, our 'plays' were appeals and were intended to have an effect on current events, to be a form of 'political activity'." Erwin Piscator, *The Political Theatre*, trans. by Hugh Rorrison (London: Eyre Methuen, 1980), p.45

¹⁷ Ernst Schumacher, "Piscator's Political Theatre", in *Brecht: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Peter Demetz (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962, 2nd pr. 1963), pp.86-96 (p.88). Piscator would arrange actors sitting among the audience to question the credibility of stage actions, to which he responded by showing documentary film. Schumacher also relates Piscator's production of *The*

Brecht, who was fascinated with Marxism yet very possibly without joining the party, was never entirely comfortable in political theatre. While he worked with Piscator at the Volksbühne in Berlin in the 1920s, he began to experiment with the *Lehrstück* or didactic drama, the culmination of which was *The Exception and The Rule* (1929/1930), partly due to Piscator's influence and mainly due to the particular historic context of the day.

For some time in the 1920s Germany appeared to be a society in transition to socialism, with the proletariat becoming a rapidly growing force. The KPD began to swing from active hostility to the small-scale workers' agit-prop theatre to wholehearted support in the organized incorporation of the arts into Communist educational work to clear the ideological ground for further development.¹⁸ Communist workers' choirs, for example, had a membership of half a million people. Like Piscator's "direct action," Brecht had in mind the new audience such as school children and workers' choral organizations when he wrote those didactic plays, aiming at a total abolition of the division between performance and audience. Playlets such as *Baden-Baden Cantata*, *He Who Said Yes*, *The Measures Taken* (all 1929/1930) as well as *The Exception and The Rule* were all written in view of the needs of small group of performers who he thought would not be satisfied with simply watching plays in the bourgeois commercial theatre but could acquire the dialectics of learning the social and economic causes of human suffering by taking active part in the preparation and performance of the play. However, as a theatre artist, not merely as a

Emperor's Coolie (1930) as an example of the director's effort in fusing stage and audience. "Coolies" played by actors were directed into the audience and then hurried upon the stage (p.93). During the performance of *Rasputin*, which Piscator considered his most successful work of the 1920s, the audience became so aroused by the stage action that they participated by joining in spontaneously with the actors on stage singing the International. See James Roose-Evans, *Experimental Theatre*, p.67

¹⁸ See Richard Stourac and Kathleen McCreery, *Theatre as a Weapon: Worker's Theatre in the Soviet Union, Germany and Britain, 1917-1934* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), p.119; p.132

result of the unexpected response to his *Lehrstück* drama,¹⁹ Brecht was fully aware that the theoretical tenets of his *Lehrstück* experiment were not meant to be eternal truths. "It is full of mistakes with respect to our time and its virtues," he pointed out, "and it is unusable for other times."²⁰ Thus, when social conditions became no longer appropriate for its practice, he abandoned it (only return to it many years later in East Germany to deal with topical issues) and resumed writing full-length plays for the professional theatre, noticeably *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* (1931) which was a result of his study of Marx's *Das Kapital*.

While Piscator may have provided Brecht with a working example of Marxist political theatre which aimed to instruct and induce change in a politically turbulent age, their relationship centres more importantly around the idea of epic drama as an innovation of the modern German theatre. Much ink has been spilt over which of the two was actually the creator of such a new type of drama,²¹ the issue becomes relatively clear-cut, however, if we pay more attention to both Piscator's and Brecht's statements. Piscator said: "The epic theatre was invented by me primarily in production and by Brecht primarily in the script."²² Brecht made more or less a same assertion when he said:

The supporters of Piscator disputed for a while with those of the playwright as to which of the two had discovered the epic style of

¹⁹ Ronald Speirs notes that the first version of *He Who Said Yes* was welcomed by some right-wing reviewers, while *The Measures Taken* elicited such a hostile response from the party that Brecht had to stop its further performance. See Ronald Speirs, *Bertolt Brecht*, p.9

²⁰ Quoted from Roswitha Mueller, "Learning for a New Society: the *Lehrstück*", in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, pp.79-95 (p.90)

²¹ See, for example, C. D. Innes, *Erwin Piscator's Political Theatre: The Development of Modern German Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p.190, where the author criticizes other scholars' effort to underestimate Piscator's experiments in their association of any "epic" qualities in contemporary plays with Brecht's work. Although only a few critics such as Helge Hultberg and Frederic Ewen have taken Piscator's influence seriously, C. D. Innes notes that "neither make any detailed comparison, minimizing Piscator's importance in Brecht's development."

²² Quoted from James Roose-Evans, *Experimental Theatre*, p.67

performance. In fact they both evolved it at the same time in different cities; P. more in the staging, the playwright in the play.²³

Since the above two statements suggest that both had separately and simultaneously discovered and developed the principles of "epic" dramaturgy, it is perhaps wise to accept that Piscator, a director who never wrote a play, and Brecht, a playwright and a part-time director without a theatre until 1949 when the Berliner Ensemble was founded, created epic theatre along parallel lines. Yet this should not eradicate the fundamental differences between their individual artistic approaches to the theatre as a moral institution.

Maria Ley-Piscator traces the first step in creating epic theatre to 1918 when Reinhardt created a dramatic society, Young Germany. His "Theatre of the Five Thousand" attempted to educate the workers to appreciate the art that the bourgeoisie enjoyed. Although best remembered for his illusionary theatre, Reinhardt's epic-scale experiments broke down the four-wall interior and spilled the action over into the audience. The second step was taken by Leopold Jessner who discarded the illusionist settings and adopted an articulated space with symbolist platforms, cones, pillars.²⁴ Then followed Karlheinz Martin, whose Tribunal turned the theatre into a realm of

²³ Quoted from C. D. Innes, *Erwin Piscator's Political Theatre*, p.192. Piscator's dedication on a portrait sent to Brecht on 1 August 1941 reads: "There will be a day when our names, yours, Brecht, and mine, will be together under the rubric [sic] of the EPIC THEATRE, and the world will know what it meant for our days and will mean for the future." The compliment returned from Brecht to Piscator is in an unpublished letter dated March 1947, which says: "For the record I want you to know that of all the people who have been involved with the theatre over the last twenty years nobody has stood as close to me as you have." Quoted from Hugh Rorrison, "Brecht and Piscator", in *Brecht in Perspective*, pp.145-159 (p.145)

²⁴ Jessner was important in the development of epic theatre in that, despite his abstractionist tendency of Expressionism, he also stressed the political function of the theatre. Following the productions of *Wilhelm Tell* (1919) and *Richard III* (1920) as political parables, he proclaimed that stage action should be relevant to social events, political, though not exactly "party-political." He said: "The most resounding melody was drowned in shouts from the street. The period wore a political face. So the theatre---unless it is to stand aside from the events of the period---will have to be political in that wider philosophical sense." See Michael Patterson, *The Revolution in German Theatre*, p.114

ideas and battlegrounds for the intelligentsia. The actors became actively involved in the workers' movement, supporting strikes by reading poems and short novels pertinent to the time in factory halls. As the political situation worsened, he left the Tribunal (both Jessner and Piscator also had similar experience with their own amateur group of Tribunal, which served as a springboard to the Berlin theatre) and set up the first Proletarian Theatre, which, under the direction of Piscator, went to perform directly for workers at factories, propagating against the imminent Fascism. After losing the Proletarian Theatre in 1921 and the Central Theatre in 1924, Piscator became a staff director of the Volksbühne, the most modern theatre of Berlin, equipped with the finest machinery of the day, where he "developed the kind of staging that formed the final concept of his Epic Theatre and laid the foundation of his future productions."²⁵

It follows from Maria Ley-Piscator that epic theatre was developed from Expressionism, or rather the left-wing Expressionist theatre, of which Piscator can be regarded as a member. Expressionism, with its montage structure, powerful visual images and elements of music and movement, did much to assert or restore the theatricality of theatre. Yet perhaps due to its high-flown style and idealistic sentiments, Piscator regarded it as reactionary, bourgeois and individualistic. Although he ended by founding a stage that was subsidized by the middle class bourgeoisie and frequented by the traditional cultured theatre-patrons,²⁶ he never renounced his belief in a truly proletarian theatre. "A revolutionary theatre without its most vital element, a revolutionary public, is a nonsense," as he told the young members of the Volksbühne.²⁷

²⁵ Maria Ley-Piscator, *The Piscator Experiment: The Political Theatre* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), pp.66-72

²⁶ On account of his previous unsuccessful experiments with amateur proletarian theatre, and also his own Bühne which went bankrupt in 1928, Piscator was brought to realize that "the proletariat, whatever the reason may be, is too weak to support a theatre of its own," an apologia which he was forced to make in the final chapter of *The Political Theatre* (p.324).

²⁷ Quoted from Michael Patterson, *The Revolution in German Theatre*, p.120

Epic theatre first came into being with Piscator's first production at the Volksbühne, *Fahnen (Flags)* by Alfons Paquet bearing the subtitle "An epic drama", in 1924.²⁸ In staging this documentary account of the anarchists' strike in Chicago in 1886, Piscator sought to offer background visual information by making use of projections of photographs and texts. Photographs of the historical figures depicted in the play were projected onto a screen during the prologue, and after each scene a written commentary on the action were shown on two boards on either side of the stage.

Piscator himself regarded his production of *Fahnen* as a very important step in his experiment with epic theatre. It was with such a play in mind when he was preparing a revised edition of his *The Political Theatre* in 1963 that he offered the following as the final definition of the concept in an inserted passage:

Briefly, it was about the extension of the action and the clarification of the background of the action, that is to say, it involved a continuation of the play beyond the dramatic framework. A didactic play (*Lehrstück*) was developed from the spectacle-play (*Schaustück*).²⁹

Thus, Piscator's idea of epic theatre was linked with political theatre, whose aim, as said earlier, was to educate or instigate by means of the dramatic form of the representation of historical events and the expansion of every individual fate to a mass fate of the epoch. The production of Paquet's *Fahnen* made him realize that the epic course of the epoch from its roots to its last effect could only be produced in a juxtaposition and succession of scenes and tableaux.³⁰ However, since it did not comprise some of the most spectacular elements, particularly the use of film, which is associated with his epic (documentary) theatre, Piscator's concept of an epic treatment of events remained unrealized until he began, in later productions such as *Trotz*

²⁸ Maria Ley-Piscator relates: "With the production of *The Flags*, Piscator found his style, a theatre between narration and drama. For the first time in theatrical history these two words were linked---Epic Drama." Maria Ley-Piscator, *The Piscator Experiment*, p.75

²⁹ Quoted from John Willett, *The Theatre of Erwin Piscator*, p.118

³⁰ Ernst Schumacher, "Piscator's Political Theatre", in *Brecht, A Collection of Critical Essays*, pp.90-91

alledem (*In Spite of Everything*, 1925), *Rasputin* (1927), *Schweik* (1928) and so on, to introduce the simultaneous stage and exploit the potential of film to comment on the stage action as well as to extend its dimensions.³¹

From the use of projections in *Fahnen* came the use of film, first in *Trotz alledem* wherein stage actions were accompanied simultaneously with the random showing of newsreel of the disturbing images of the First World War. Convinced that these pictures could serve "not only as a pedagogic device, but as a means of lifting the whole drama from its original level and making it a play with a message on a higher level,"³² Piscator began to adopt a more careful approach in *Sturmflut* (1926), for which a film was specially made for the first time, shown on the screen at the rear of the stage by a number of projectors, creating a fourth dimension of the theatre and extending the perspective of the stage. In *Rasputin* the use of film was carried a step further in that its use contrasted the life of the Tsar against the death of Russian soldiers, thus creating an example of the rare dialectic in Piscator's epic theatre. The use of cartoon film from the drawings of George Grosz in *Schweik* together with an innovative use of two conveyor belts that travelled the width of the stage embodied, as Piscator claimed, the "dramatic-epic principle" which was suitable for adapting a picaresque novel for the stage without resulting in a disjointed presentation due to its multiplicity of episodes.³³

Apart from the use of film, which could be shown on almost every type of surface in his theatre, including backdrop, stage-construct or an additional screen hung above the proscenium, Piscator also used smaller screens or boards that were set on either side of the stage and could be lowered from the flies for the projections of stills, statistics, captions or quotations, providing additional information deemed as necessary in co-ordination with the actions going onstage. Commentator or narrator as

³¹ C. D. Innes, *Erwin Piscator's Political Theatre*, p.104

³² Erwin Piscator, *The Political Theatre*, p.74

³³ See Michael Patterson, *The Revolution in German Theatre*, p.126

an intermediary between the stage action and the world of audience, which he first adopted in *The Red Revue*, also remained as a frequently used technique.³⁴

Technical devices like these, as well as many others, which combined to revolutionize the theatre, were experimented by Piscator on account of his dissatisfaction with the existing texts for a political theatre,³⁵ which perhaps also accounted for the group of most talented political writers of the day, including Brecht himself, gathering under him to write and adapt playtexts. Accordingly, when there appeared some appropriate material, such as Friedrich Wolf's *Tai Yang erwacht* (*Tai Yang Awakes*, 1931), he seemed happy to return to a simple form of staging, with minimal machinery involved.

There was small wonder that *Tai Yang erwacht* should come to meet Piscator's requirement of playtext for his theatre. Friedrich Wolf belonged to the workers' agit-prop theatre movement which sprang into action shortly after the November Revolution in 1918. While playwriting and acting remained the weakest areas of such a theatre,³⁶ Wolf arrived on the scene at a later stage when he (with his Performance Troupe Southwest which he was to found in 1932) was able to reap the benefits of its previous experience and make full use of montage which it had developed to a high standard, thus becoming perhaps its best representative. Wolf's work sought not only to educate his fellow countrymen about the political situations in Germany, but also to arouse their attention to international current affairs, particularly to what was going on in China, for what was happening there could also happen in their own country. It was not merely a political reaction against Germany's support of war of intervention against revolutionary China in the 1920s and of Japanese intention to invade China later in the early 1930s, and might have also been related to with the Moscow agit-

³⁴ See C. D. Innes, *Erwin Piscator's Political Theatre*, pp.104-106

³⁵ See Erwin Piscator, *The Political Theatre*, p.134

³⁶ Most of the agit-prop plays were purely functional, transient, and thus left no record. Stourac and McCreery also note that "some plays were little more than sloganeering, others veered unselectively towards the naturalistic language of everyday speech. In the acting cartoon types or model workers prevailed." Richard Stourac and Kathleen McCreery, *Theatre as a Weapon*, p.173

prop group the Blue Blouse that toured Germany in 1927, staging *Hands Off China!* among other items it had brought there. (Wolf was also to write *From New York to Shanghai* in 1932, a two-hour scene montage with choral music and masks, and the Chinese agitator Wang linking twenty-four scenes set in cities all over the world in an international opposition to the imperialist war in Asia; Brecht's *The Measures Taken*, though a fantasy about sending four Communists to China instigating its people to rise against the reactionary government, can also be viewed in similar fashion.)

Tai Yang erwacht was written in 1931 and staged by Piscator at the Wallnerth, Berlin. It was Piscator's last production before he went into exile in the same year, and was commonly regarded as his best in that it was his final move "towards what was recognizably an 'epic' style of acting."³⁷ The use of film, which Piscator demanded from Moscow, was indispensable here as usual. He had a line of demonstrators marching across the back of the stage, carrying empty banners upon which film images were projected. Although seemingly a device to bridge the gap between the stage and screen, the effect was to make the audience too conscious of the artificiality.³⁸ Nevertheless, the strength of the production lay in the rhythmic movements of the weaving-women, the mime of the execution and the symbolic dance of the marching demonstrators on a relatively bare stage, on top of the prologue which Piscator added to Wolf's text, during which actors entered, and while discussing the political situation in China in relation to the social conditions in Germany, changed into their costumes, and put on their make-up. However, such a

³⁷ See Michael Patterson, *The Revolution in German Theatre*, p.129; and also C. D. Innes, *Erwin Piscator's Political Theatre*, p.158

³⁸ J. L. Styan, *Expressionism and Epic Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982; repr. 1986)), p.132. Brecht, who also was aware of its preparation and watched the play, was to comment on this device though it turned out to be slightly different:

There was to have been a play about the Chinese revolution with a number of banners on sticks bearing short printed slogans about the situation. [...] They were supposed to have inscriptions on the back as well, so that they could be turned round to show other slogans as a background to the incidents on the stage.

device was not Piscator's invention, as some critics would think.³⁹ Brecht had used it in the production of *The Threepenny Opera* (1928), and was to use it again in his 1954 German première of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.⁴⁰

Reminiscing the relationship between the dramatic careers of both Piscator and himself and the historical context of modern Germany, Brecht says:

Piscator was making political theatre before the Augsburger. He had taken part in the war, the Augsburger not. The 1918 revolution, in which both took part, had made the Augsburger disillusioned and turned Piscator into a politician. It was only later that the Augsburger came to politics through study.⁴¹

Although he tried to disassociate himself with Piscator in terms of politics in the theatre (for he was introduced to Marxism through Karl Korsch, an independent thinker who was thrown out of the party, around the mid-1920s when he had difficulties in writing a topical play for Piscator's theatre on philosophical and scientific grounds), he openly acknowledged his indebtedness and accorded the most generous praise to him when he said: "Piscator was one of the greatest theatre men of all time. He electrified the theatre and made it capable of mastering great subjects."⁴² Like Piscator, he also believed that formal innovation was necessary if the theatre was to confront the public with the central issues of the age, as the traditional form of drama could no longer encompass the complexities of the modern world wherein the

³⁹ See, for example, Michael Patterson, *The Revolution in German Theatre*, p.129

⁴⁰ Critics also note that Wolf's *Tai Yang erwacht* left some impact upon Brecht's later major plays such as *The Good Person of Szechuan* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Alfred D. White, for example, points out that "he apparently took details such as the name Shu Fu" from it, though it seems that he may have mistaken the two plays for each other in their final versions. See Alfred D. White, *Bertolt Brecht's Great Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1978), p.123. Renata Berg-Pam argues that Wolf's play was one source of inspiration for the plot of *The Good Person of Szechuan* in that it not only presents Shu Fu as a character in the final version of the play, but also uses a prostitute as the heroine, like Tai Yang who becomes the tea girl of a lecherous factory owner named Tschu-fu. See Renata Berg-Pam, *Bertolt Brecht and China*, pp.183-185

⁴¹ Bertolt Brecht, *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, p.68

⁴² *ibid*, p.67

individual no longer had any direct, personal control over his own fate. He wrote in 1929:

Simply to comprehend the new areas of subject-matter imposes a new dramatic and theatrical form. [...] Today's catastrophes do not progress in a straight line but in cyclical crises; the "heroes" change with the different phases, are interchangeable; etc.; the graph of people's actions is complicated by abortive actions; fate is no longer a single coherent power; rather there are fields of force which can be seen radiating in opposite directions. [...] It is impossible to explain a present-day character by features, or a present-day action by motives, that would have been adequate in our father's time.⁴³

In his search for new forms of theatrical expressions, Brecht came under Piscator's influence, particularly in terms of the latter's use of machinery and screen projection from which Brecht's half-curtain and the revolving stage in *Mother Courage* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* may have derived.⁴⁴ However, with regard to the fact that Brecht, as said earlier, was without a regular acting company until the Berliner Ensemble, was at the early stages of his dramatic career more concerned with looking for an organic directorial/acting style that was to underline the production of his forthcoming major works to instruct the audience of the scientific age beset with alienation, rather than a reconstruction of the stage with expensive machinery in the fashion of the "Maschinentheater" that to Piscator's mind was "epic theatre." After all, such technical innovations, the efforts to bring to the stage the life of reality and to include the masses in the action, were at bottom only a variation of bourgeois illusionism, a theatrical experiment which Tairov and Meyerhold had carried out along parallel lines and then quickly abandoned.⁴⁵ This was perhaps one of the

⁴³ Bertolt Brecht, "On Form and Subject-Matter", in *Brecht on Theatre*, pp.29-31 (p.30)

⁴⁴ In his writings, Brecht makes several references of Piscator's use of machinery and simultaneous stage, acknowledging him as the pioneer in electrifying the mechanics of staging plays and transforming the scenic potentialities of the theatre. See for example, Bertolt Brecht, "The German Drama: pre-Hitler", in *Brecht on Theatre*, pp.77-84 (pp.77-78), *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, pp.64-65, and also C. D. Innes, *Erwin Piscator's Political Theatre*, p.197

⁴⁵ Ernst Schumacher, "Piscator's Political Theatre", in *Brecht: A Collection of Critical Essays*, pp.93-94

reasons why Brecht should later renounce the term of epic theatre as a definition of his theory and practice of theatre, and opted for "dialectical drama."

In his few attempts at directing his early plays before he went into exile, Brecht had already displayed his predilection for an alienating style of acting. It was in 1924 with the première of his adaptation of Marlowe's *Edward II* at the Kammerspiele Munich that Brecht formally directed for the first time, though he had been invited by the Deutsches Theater in Berlin to produce Arnolt Bronnen's *Vatermord (Parricide)* in 1922. Piscator-style projections were first used here (then again in *A Man's a Man*, 1926) to give dates and background information before each scene. Yet more significantly, Brecht initiated the use of white make-up for soldiers, to indicate, or rather, to make the audience suddenly grasp at, the fear with which they entered the battle.⁴⁶ This technique not only remained in *A Man's a Man* but was also related to the use of masks in the production of plays such as *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. The next own play, *Baal*, which Brecht directed, in collaboration with Oskar Homolka, is not particularly worth mentioning, as it was just a single matinée performance marking his not very noticeable directing début in Berlin in 1926 (*Baal* had already been produced by Alwin Kronacher at Atles Theater, Leipzig, three years before).

The Threepenny Opera (first produced 1928), an anti-opera written after the fashion of Wedekind's cabaret-style ballads, can be regarded as Brecht's third directorial attempt. Directed by Erich Engel with participation by Brecht, it first saw a new device of making a character (Peachum, in this case) address directly to the audience, outlining his own situation (with a large placard bearing the word "IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE" hanging on the flies), a device which the playwright was to use frequently later for the purposes of the alienation

⁴⁶ Michael Patterson relates that Brecht, being unhappy at rehearsals about the way the soldiers went off to war, he went to consult Karl Valentin about how they looked before a battle, who replied: "They're scared, they look pale." Brecht picked up the clue from this matter-of-fact answer, and made the soldiers up white. See Michael Patterson, *The Revolution in German Theatre*, p.169

effect. Secondly, the music for the opera was composed by Kurt Weill, who was to collaborate with Brecht on many of his other works, providing "a powerful mechanism to reclaim and refunction in 'epic drama' the presentational mode of address, long a standard in most forms of music-theatre but discarded by modern drama after the 'fourth wall' had been dismantled."⁴⁷ And furthermore, as said earlier, Brecht first introduced here the theatrical device of changing costumes directly in front of the audience. In one of the most effective scenes of the opera, Peachum lectures proper begging techniques for better financial results to his beggars who, without retreating to the backstage, transform from a set of healthy rogues into cripples covered in sores and dressed in rags, holding placards declaring that they have suffered for the Queen and Country. Here, the audience is invited to think how those genuine beggars without "expert advice" would fare. As Ronald Gray comments,

The technique of "Verfremdung" has been developed a further step: the scene depends for its effect not on the direct participation of the audience in the happenings on stage, which are deliberately "acted out," but by their reacting from them and remembering more forcefully the true stage of things.⁴⁸

The fourth and last play which Brecht directed before he and his family fled Berlin was *The Measures Taken* (1930), though it was not originally intended for theatre production but as an educative experience for the participants. Brecht's theatre style as embodied in this play chiefly lies in two aspects, the self-introduction of the characters and interpolation of songs. Brecht had the actions of the young, inexperienced member of the group played alternatively by each of the four agitators sent to China, who indicated his representativeness in front of the jury panel, restraining the audience from self-identification, a technique that is not only in the

⁴⁷ Kim H. Howalke, "Brecht and Music: Theory and Practice", in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, pp.218-234 (p.218)

⁴⁸ Ronald Gray, *Brecht* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1961), p.48

fashion of *Verfremdung*, but also recalls Chinese theatre. Similarly, the jury panel, which was composed by a "control chorus," took the form of straight commentary or exhortation, its songs marking off the dramatic action by having the character addressing the audience directly. It provided an opportunity to underline the "gestic" presentation of people's behaviour, its certain important attitudes or features being isolated and stressed. Such an acting style was to be exploited further in Brecht's later works such as *Mother Courage and Her Children*, and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

Another production of Brecht's early plays that is particularly worth mentioning is *A Man's a Man* in 1926. Directed by Jacob Geis, it was important in the sense that it was designed by Caspar Neher, Brecht's favourite designer, who had previously worked on the stage set for *Baal* in the same year, and who was to continue to work for him throughout his lifetime, designing sets that best embodied his intention.⁴⁹ Apart from the projections that were also used, the powerful visual images of the production included the white make-up for Galy Gay after recovering from his mock-execution to be transformed into a soldier (a representation of the loss of individuality), the exaggerated costumes of padded, bulging jackets, and noses and hands, of the soldiers who walked on stilts (a depiction of their depersonalized selves), the uniform white light onstage despite most of the actions that take place at night (the demystification of the theatre), etc. What was more important about the Darmstadt première of the play, however, was that it first introduced the half-curtain for which Brecht was to become famous in terms of innovation of the traditional proscenium stage. Although there was still a pause in the production, that was filled by singing a verse, while the sets were changed, with the introduction of the half-curtain,

⁴⁹ Ronald Speirs notes that in designing for Brecht's theatre, Caspar Neher would first work on the relationships of the characters on any given scene, capture the *gestus* in a sketch which grouped them in significant poses, and then develop the blocking and movements of the scenes in conjunction with these sketches. Sometimes Brecht would not proceed with the direction of a scene without seeking Neher's advice about positioning. Ronald Speirs, *Bertolt Brecht*, p.67

the audience is no longer encouraged to view the stage as a separate world into which the spectator must be transported; on the other hand, it allows a modicum of surprise at each new setting or tableau and prevents the unnecessary distraction of seeing the set changed in full view.⁵⁰

From the above brief summary of Brecht's early directorial experiments, it can be seen that although it seemed that some of his ideas may have been based on Piscator's, in an effort to develop his own form of epic theatre, his theatrical means were technically simpler than those of his mentor. Piscator used the stage as a propaganda platform, devising many innovative technical means for the purpose of providing the audience with the information needed for spreading his tendentious messages. Thus, his productions tended to draw the spectator into the world of dramatic actions on a noncritical level of emotional absorption. Brecht, however, intended his theatre to demonstrate events not as fixed but capable of changing. He applied only those nonatmospheric techniques that would present paradoxes and contradictions and stimulate critical thinking. Therefore, it is the incitement of the spectator to view the action on stage critically that distinguishes Brecht's particular conception of epic theatre from Piscator's use of the term.⁵¹

In defining the German "episch" as not entirely synonymous with the English "epic," Ronald Gray suggests that it is "slower-paced, reflective, giving time to reflect and compare."⁵² Piscator's theatre, wherein the exhibition of modern stage machinery replaced aesthetic criteria with criteria of effectiveness, was by no means a slow-paced, reflective theatre, whereas Brecht's was. When Brecht looked forward to "the creation of a great epic and documentary theatre which will be suited to our period" in

⁵⁰ Michael Patterson, *The Revolution in German Theatre*, p.163

⁵¹ *ibid*, p.153. Brecht's conception of epic theatre as distinguished from dramatic theatre was first clearly set down in his notes to *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1930). See Bertolt Brecht, "The Modern Theatre Is the Epic Theatre", in *Brecht on Theatre*, pp.33-42 (p.37)

⁵² Ronald Gray, *Brecht*, p.72

the 1920s,⁵³ he was looking for a "style of production that our plays need and encourage, [...] that it appeals less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason."⁵⁴ Thus, the term epic was connected in his mind with a detached, dispassionate manner of presentation.

The need for the kind of theatrical representation that could express the socio-historical conditions of his time made Brecht also look to the East for inspiration. One year before his encounter with Mei Lanfang's acting in Moscow in Spring, 1935, he had already realized the close similarities between epic drama and Chinese theatre which he was going to explore and benefit from. In an interview with Luth Otto the first year into his exile in Denmark, Brecht points out:

We need to get right away from the old naturalistic school of acting, the dramatic school with its large emotions. [...] This isn't the kind of representation that can express our time; it isn't going to sway a purely modern audience. For that one has to apply the only form of acting that I find natural: the epic, story-telling kind. It is the kind the Chinese have been using for thousands of years.⁵⁵

How Brecht got to know about "the epic, story-telling kind" of acting of Chinese theatre remains a myth to be solved, for there is no record showing any performance by either amateur or professional Chinese actors in Germany at that time. Although the country had seen a step-up vogue of "chinoiserie" in the early decades of the century with the publication of a large amount of translations and books on Chinese literature and philosophy, which could be regarded, to a certain degree, as a continuation of exoticism in Europe since the eighteenth century, the German interest in China was mainly associated with its symbolical image as a political reaction which could be first used to counteract the equally politically

⁵³ See the editorial note to Bertolt Brecht, "Shouldn't We Abolish Aesthetics?", in *Brecht on Theatre*, pp.20-22 (p.22)

⁵⁴ Bertolt Brecht, "The Epic Theatre and Its Difficulties", in *Brecht on Theatre*, pp.22-24 (p.22; p.23)

⁵⁵ Bertolt Brecht, "Interview with an Exile", in *Brecht on Theatre*, pp.65-69 (p.68)

repressive Prussian state, particularly in the nineteenth century, and then as a rising revolutionary force that provided a subject of great human concern and served to represent the hopes of Germany's working classes for a better world.⁵⁶ Brecht was also affected by the widely spread political or intellectual interest in China, and showed a life-long fascination with ancient Chinese philosophy and poetry as a retreat from the pains and doubts arising in human life as a result of dehumanizing technology.⁵⁷ The closest encounter he had with Chinese theatre, however, apart from the German translations of Chinese drama which he might have read, was through Reinhardt's 1925 production of Klabund's Chinese play *Der Kreidekreis*, which was a free adaptation and pseudo-Chinese, though (to be discussed in Chapter III).

One source that might have contributed to Brecht's knowledge about Chinese theatre style prior to his contact with Mei Lanfang could be Russia whose geographical position enabled it to serve as a bridge between the Eastern and Western culture. Divergent or incongruous it may sound, we should remember that in the early decades of the century, particularly after the establishment of the new Soviet Union, there was a noticeable cross current in the aspect of artistic life between Germany and Russia.⁵⁸ Like Germany after the First World War, Russia had seen the carnage of the

⁵⁶ For Western scholarship on this subject, see Margret Dietrich, "The Far East---Its Reflection in and Influences on the European Theatre", trans. by Bindon Russel, *Theatre Research*, (1962), 170-194; Ernst Rose, "China as a Symbol of Reaction in Germany, 1830-1880", *Comparative Literature*, 3 (1951), 57-76; Adrian Hsia, "*The Orphan of the House Zhao* in French, English, German, and Hong Kong", *Comparative Literature Studies*, 25 (1988), 335-351; and Chapter I "Sinology and Chinoiserie in Germany from 1900 to 1930", in Renata Berg-Pam, *Bertolt Brecht and China*, pp.1-24

⁵⁷ See Chapter IV "Brecht in Berlin: Chinese Philosophy" (pp.70-96), Chapter V "Confucius and Marx: Chinese Philosophy and Brecht's Marxism" (pp.97-137), Chapter VIII "Arthur Waley---The Inventor of Chinese Poetry for Brecht" (pp.219-248), and Chapter IX "Affinities between Chinese Poetry and Brecht's Verse" (pp.249-273), in Renata Berg-Pam, *Bertolt Brecht and China*; and "Chinese Poetry" (pp.81-152) and "Chinese Philosophy" (pp.347-498) in Antony Tatlow, *The Mask of Evil*

⁵⁸ John Willett describes this cultural phenomenon as a "two-way traffic" based mainly on the ideological kinship. The militantly "proletarian" phase of Soviet culture was strongly echoed in Germany where Communist artists increasingly took their directives from Moscow. German artists also frequently

war and the dissipation of the Empire. Unlike Germany that looked for a short period of time like a country in transition to socialism after the November Revolution, Russia had founded the Communist régime following the October Revolution in 1917, and was facing problems consolidating its rule amidst a series of economic crises and especially food shortage, while trying to normalize its relations with outside world (such as the maintenance of a Western Bureau of the Comintern in Berlin, and supporting the bourgeois democratic revolution under the leadership of Dr. Sun Yatsen in China). It was a period of disillusionment, unease and suppression. Whereas the political theatre, or rather, the agit-prop movement, which came into being a couple of years later than that in Germany, was met with the Party's hostile intolerance, the avant-garde trend in the mainstream theatre, represented by Meyerhold, Tairov, Mayakovsky and so on, which started around the turn of the century, continued with its stylistic innovations used to destroy the realistic stage convention, before Stalin decreed that Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theatre was the only realistic art for the party.

For obvious reasons here, we cannot go into details about the history of Chinese presence in Russian theatre.⁵⁹ It is more pertinent to focus the attention on

visited Russia and even took jobs there, notably in architecture and the cinema. See John Willett, *The Theatre of Erwin Piscator*, p.41

Katherine Bliss Eaton notes that after Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theatre made its first German tour in 1906, Russian ensembles became fairly commonplace in Germany. Soviet avant-garde directors and their groups began to visit there in 1923; agit-prop group Blue Blouse in 1927; and Meyerhold's ensemble made its first foreign tour there in 1930, etc. See Katherine Bliss Eaton, *The Theatre of Meyerhold and Brecht* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1985), pp.12-13

Brecht's film *Kuble Wampe* premièred in Moscow in 1932, and *The Threepenny Opera*, under the title of *The Beggars' Opera* remained in the repertory of Tairov's Kamerny Theatre from 1930. See Marjorie L. Hoover, "Brecht's Soviet Connection Tretiakov", *Brecht Heute · Brecht Today*, 3 (1973), 39-56 (p.43)

⁵⁹ According to Gong Hede, who allegedly wrote the first comprehensive article on the influence of Chinese theatre in the West from history down to the present, Chinese theatre was first introduced to the Russians by the imperial commissioner sent by the Tsar in 1692 to China where he saw dramatic performance and acrobatics, and was impressed by the performance skills as well as the spectacular

some of the most representative Russian avant-gardists whose experiments laid bare certain basic theatrical problems and made them accessible to critical reflection. Their non-illusionistic art chiefly consisted in interpolation of dances and songs, grotesque costuming, emphasis on stage movement and exaggerated gestures, abstract or highly simplified stage settings, as well as the training of actors as artistically and socially conscious performers, all of which Brecht would adopt along more or less analogous lines. Anticipating Brecht, they were attracted to similar elements in the traditional theatres of the East, looking for important historical connections which could illuminate their theory and practice of theatre.⁶⁰

In 1913 Tairov produced *The Yellow Jacket*, a play by J. H. Benrimo and J. Hazelton based on a Chinese folk-tale. The production was a stylization of the Chinese theatre elements in terms of scenic conventions, gestures and movements, and the use of property man. It was rich in symbolic use of stage furniture: two stools with a board laid across representing a flowing stream, a table with stools on top suggesting mountains tops, and a wooden ladder standing for the road to Heaven. The action of horse-riding was carried out through the gestures of the actor who leapt in the air and beat himself on the legs. The property man, who silently instigated the changes of setting and facilitated the development of the action, held out a stick to represent a door, raised a lighted candle in a hoop on a stick to suggest moonlight, and etc.⁶¹

Meyerhold was probably the first among the Russian avant-gardists to adopt the elements of Chinese theatre tradition.⁶² In late 1910 in Petersburg, he produced

costumes of Chinese theatre. See Gong Hede, "Chinese Drama: An Important Reference for the Western Theatre (I)" ("Zhongguo Xiju---Xifang Xiju de Zhongyao Canzhao", *Play (Juben)*, 2 (1992), 23-26 (p.23)

⁶⁰ See Katherine Bliss Eaton, *The Theatre of Meyerhold and Brecht*, p.8

⁶¹ Nick Worrall, *Modernism to Realism on the Soviet Stage: Tairov - Vakhtangov - Okhlopkov* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.24

⁶² He is reported as disputing with Tairov, at a seminar held on Mei Lanfang's art in Moscow in 1935, over the credit of being the first to experiment with Chinese theatre style. When Tairov claimed that he

Schnitzler's *Columbine's Scarf* and Znosko-Borovsky's *The Transfigured Prince*. The productions were done in pantomime version, and took place at the House of Interludes, where the audience sat at tables to eat and drink while watching, recalling the traditional practice of Chinese theatre whose original localities included teahouses. Later when he was working on his new theories of revolutionary art, especially the technique of biomechanics, a theatre style which aims at transforming the actor into a theatrically interesting entity through gestures and movements pertinent to the expression of a given idea, based on rhythm, a centre of gravity, and stability, or metrical patterns and musical timing, he was to find very beneficial the acrobatic precision, the calculated gestures and the explicit theatricality of Chinese theatre. Not only did he employ a Mongolian acrobat to help training his actors, his Studio Programs of 1915 and 1918 both included items of Chinese theatre.⁶³ Actors' exercises, which included going through an imaginary door on the Chinese stage and stage fight such as throwing and catching the spear amidst leaps and somersaults, were exemplified particularly in the chase sequence in *The Magnanimous Cuckold* (1922), with around thirty performers doing leaps, somersaults, leapfrogs and fighting each other with spears. The effect of Chinese scenic conventions was perhaps best seen in his 1924 production of Ostrovsky's *The Forest* wherein an assortment of real objects with no obvious relationship was assembled on the stage to be turned into stage properties at will by the actors. A table was used to suggest a bridge, a chair

was very proud of himself as being the first, on the basis of his production of *The Yellow Jacket* in 1913, Meyerhold disagreed by citing his experiments at the House of Interludes in 1910. See Gong Hede, "Chinese Theatre: An Important Reference for the Western Theatre (III)", *Play*, 4 (1992), 19-25 (p.19)

⁶³ The program of 1915 included the fragment of a Chinese play entitled *The Catwoman, the Bird and the Snake* [sic], which was done in a pantomime version by Meyerhold and Soloviev, using Chinese scenic conventions; Term 3 in the syllabus for a new acting school and workshop in 1918 focused on the styles of theatrical presentation of "exotic theatre" including Chinese. See Robert Leach, *Vsevolod Meyerhold* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp.48-51

symbolizing a hill, and so on, a practice that was to be made use of by Brecht especially in his 1949 production of *Mr Puntila and His Man Matti*.

Under his influence, or rather, in the tradition of the fairly widespread interest in forms of oriental theatre in Russia during that period, Meyerhold's pupil Okhlopkov was to exploit the Chinese convention of property man.⁶⁴ In his 1935 production of Pogodin's *Aristocrats* (month of the year unknown, very possibly shortly before Mei Lanfang's appearance) that was acclaimed as his greatest success during his Realistic Theatre period,⁶⁵ the stage objects were brought on by property men who, dressed alike in pale blue dungarees and masked, also took active part in the performance. They functioned in every possible way without uttering a single word. They sprang lightly to the actors, passing on objects that were needed in the action, such as a telephone, vanished equally lightly when it was done, and whisked away stage furniture, such as chairs, when they were no longer needed. They rushed to the scene when the effect of a full blowing blizzard was needed, tossing huge handfuls of tiny white confetti, amidst swirling, whistling and screaming music, high into the air, some of which fell on the audience, too; they also lay underneath the canvas to agitate it and simulate the waves of the river the fugitives from the work camp were swimming across by lying prone on it.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ In 1902, the company of Otodziro Kawakami, the first Japanese actors ever to be seen in the West, performed in Russia. Perhaps on account of their repertoire which was largely western and their style a modernised version of *Kabuki*, or of his own knowledge about its connection with Chinese theatre, Meyerhold makes no reference to Japanese theatre in his account of the Theatre-Studio. He attributed the practice of property man to the Chinese though it was also adopted, by the name of "*kurogo*," in Japanese theatre. He began to hold up the style of Mei Lanfang as a model to his actors after he hosted the latter's guest appearance at the Central Art Worker's Club in Moscow in April 1935, and dedicated his second production of *Woe to Wit*, later in the same year, to the Chinese actor. See Edward Braun, *The Theatre of Meyerhold: Revolution on the Modern Stage* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979), pp.47-48; Edward Braun, trans. & ed., *Meyerhold on Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1969), p.235; and Robert Leach, *Vsevolod Meyerhold*, p.90

⁶⁵ See Nick Worrall, *Modernism to Realism on the Soviet Stage*, p.161

⁶⁶ See André Van Gyseghem, *Theatre in Soviet Russia* (London: Fabre and Fabre, N. D.), p.201; and also Marjorie L. Hoover, "Brecht's Soviet Connection Tretiakov", p.48

Okhlopkov's use of Chinese theatre conventions could not have possibly contributed to Brecht's awareness of Chinese acting as exemplified in his 1934 interview. Yet, as the following discussions seek to show, the production of *Aristocrats*, which laid bare the illusory means employed, forcing the audience to complete in imagination the reality alluded to, would become inextricably connected with the term of *Verfremdung* Brecht was to adopt, although its effect in this specific performance appeared simplified and naive, as Marjorie L. Hoover suggests.⁶⁷

Could it be from Eisenstein, another pupil of Meyerhold's, who met Brecht, in the company of Mayakovsky and Tretiakov, and held a wide range of talks on art with him during his first trip to Moscow for the première of his film *Kubel Wampe* in May 1932, that Brecht got the idea about Chinese theatre style? For all that we know, Eisenstein, who was to be impressed with Mei Lanfang's acting so much as to describe him as "the acme of perfection," "the sum total of those elements which form the kernel of any art work," was first introduced to the work of the Chinese artist by Charlie Chaplin who had seen Mei Lanfang's enormously successful performance in America in 1930 and had talked and taken photographs with him.⁶⁸

Or, could it be from the German emigré Bernhard Reich and his Russian wife Latvian Anna Lacis who was especially interested in Meyerhold's experimental theatre and brought to Germany the theatrical experience of the Russian avant-gardists' work. They met Brecht around 1924 when the latter was preparing the production of *Edward II*. Brecht offered Lacis the job as assistant director in addition to the role of young Edward, and began to plie the couple with questions about the Russian theatre, the Soviet Union and Soviet art policy.⁶⁹ Whether the couple also

⁶⁷ Marjorie L. Hoover, "Brecht's Soviet Connection Tretiakov", p.48

⁶⁸ Eisenstein, who was fully aware of the popularity of Mei Lanfang in American cities as well as the influence of the Chinese theatre upon the Soviet theatre, acknowledges this in his 1935 article introducing the latter to Russian audiences, saying "Charlie Chaplin was the first to tell me about the remarkable work of this great Chinese artist." See Sergei Eisenstein, "The Enchanter from the Pear Garden", *Theatre Arts Monthly*, 19 (1935), 761-770 (p.761; p.762; p.769)

⁶⁹ See Katherine Bliss Eaton, *The Theatre of Meyerhold and Brecht*, pp.16-18

passed on information about the Chinese presence in the modern Russian experimental theatre cannot be known. But it was very possibly through them that Brecht got to know Tretiakov, thanks to whom he was brought into direct contact not only with the left-wing Russian avant-garde movement, but also with Mei Lanfang's theatre.

After collaborating with Eisenstein, then a student under Meyerhold, in producing his play *Gas Mask* (1924) for the "proletkult" theatre before the latter found his true vocation for film, Tretiakov went to teach Russian for a year and half (1924-1925) at the University of Peking, China, where he acquired firsthand knowledge of both cultural and political life there. One of the intellectual results gained from his Chinese experience was reflected in his indignant "drama of fact" *Roar, China!* (1925), based on a real incident in Wanxian on the upper Yangtze River in 1924 in which the captain of the British gunboat *Cockchafer* demanded, otherwise he would shell the city, the execution of two innocent Chinese oarsmen, and the humiliating attendance of the local Chinese administratives at the funeral for an American shipping agent who fell into the river and drowned during a brawl with the local Chinese coolies whose livelihood was being threatened by his monopoly in shipping goods on the river with technologically advanced equipment.

Although the structure of this nine-scene play with an action spanning exactly twenty-four hours can be analyzed according to the traditional pattern of the classical five-act division drama,⁷⁰ it raised issues concerning China as a new, arising revolutionary force and provoked wide-range interest, particularly after it was

⁷⁰ Lars Kleberg points out that the plot of the play shows a distinctive pattern of *introduction* (presentation of the antagonism between Chinese people and Western imperialists), *rising action* (the confrontation between the coolies and the American agent; and following his death, the British captain's ultimatum), *climax* (the local Chinese officials obliging the demands and the selection of two innocent oarsmen to be executed), *falling action* (the Chinese officials' attendance of the funeral on the gunboat, with the oarsmen awaiting), and the *dénouement* or *catastrophe* (the execution). See Lars Kleberg, *Theatre as Action: Soviet Russian Avant-Garde Aesthetics*, trans. by Charles Rougle (London: Macmillan, 1993), pp.90-91

successfully produced by Vasily Fyodorov in Moscow when Meyerhold chose it to open his theatre season in 1926 and entrusted the task to his pupil.⁷¹ The stage was segmented into two halves by the use of real water which reflected the light from the ship in the background. On one side of the stage was commercial Western world, represented by piles of goods; the other was China, represented by a Chinese sampan. Later in the production, the guns of the British gun-boat protruded over the water, which, giving the feel of the metal rather than its mere painted appearance, suggested the destruction of the barrier, i.e. the water, between the East and West. The action passed from one side of the stage to the other, sometimes on the Chinese quay where the sampan belonged, sometimes on the American ship or the British gun-boat. Apart from this symbolic constructivist-style stage set, there were abundant symbols and emblems, such as the suicide of the Chinese cabin boy outside the captain's door, suggesting the prevailing spirit of non-resistance. The Chinese coolies wearing masks were represented as carrying sacks of tea, a symbolic burden which determined that China must not roar yet as long as it was not thrown off. At the start of the play, they were shown in an act of loading sacks of tea into the American ship by first tossing and catching them in the air before throwing them quickly unto the shoulders and quickly carrying them away (a variation of the skill of spear-throwing in Chinese theatre), synchronized by the rhythms of their chanting voices and the shouts of the foreman. As the play proceeded, however, such a rhythmic movement began to slow down. Towards the concluding part, the tempo had become extremely slow, the

⁷¹ The production was hugely popular, remaining in Meyerhold theatre's repertoire for six years, and featured in the theatre's European tour of 1930. Although it was banned in Paris, it soon became the first Soviet play to enjoy international repute, produced respectively in Germany, Poland, Norway, Estonia, England, America, Canada, Japan, India and even China. It was also performed in a Nazi concentration camp in Poland in 1944. See Robert Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.167; Edward Braun, *Meyerhold: A Revolution in Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1979, 2nd rev. & exp. edn, 1995), p.220; Walter J. Meserve and Ruth I. Meserve, "The Stage History of *Roar, China!*: Documentary Drama as Propaganda", *Theatre Survey* 21 (1980), 1-13; Alvin Goldfarb, "*Roar, China!* in a Nazi Concentration Camp", *Theatre Survey*, 21 (1980), 184-185

chanting voices to musical accompaniment being retreated into the background, the suffering groans and gestures intensifying the tragic torment of the masses.

Roar, China! was a considerable contribution of Meyerhold's theatre to the subject-matter of "Hands off China" which was explored by the radical Russian and German artists at the time.⁷² Brecht, who had a strong interest in the political situation in China at the time, came to its defence when its production at Piscator's theatre in 1930 received hostile review from the German critics.⁷³ Shortly after, he was to meet Tretiakov when the latter came to Germany to give lectures (1930-1931) and very possibly showed him around his hometown Augsburg, thus beginning a close friendship that would last till the latter's execution by the Stalin régime in 1939 on the alleged grounds of espionage.

Tretiakov had a special interest in Chinese theatre. It was very possibly thanks to him that Mei Lanfang was invited and sponsored by the All-Soviet Society for Cultural Relations with Abroad for a Russian tour in April 1935. Brecht happened to be in Moscow at the time, perhaps to attend the opening of Moscow metro, staying at Tretiakov's apartment as he did during the previous visit there in 1932. Tretiakov brought him to see not only the production of *Aristocrats* by Okhlopkov, but also Mei's performances, especially at the tea-party held in his honour at the Central Art Worker's Club, hosted by Meyerhold, and the subsequent seminar on his art at the auditorium of the All-Soviet Society for Cultural Relations with Abroad, presided by Danchenko.

⁷² Huntly Carter notes that in *Roar, China!* Meyerhold made a considerable contribution to the Society of "Hands off China" in a form of his own. See Huntly Carter, *The New Spirit in the Russian Theatre (1917-28)* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1970), p.217

⁷³ In a letter dated April 1930, Brecht showed his interest in the play and his concern for the presence of Western imperialists in China, and defended the production as a play that fulfilled the historical function of the theatre. He also wrote of his appreciation for both the play and its author in 1934: "In Russia there's one man who's working along the right lines, Tretiakov; a play like *Roar, China!* shows him to have found quite a new means of expression." See Walter J. Meserve and Ruth I. Meserve, "The Stage History of *Roar, China!*", p.5

Brecht was fortunate to be in Moscow then, for it proved to be a historical opportunity providing him with the direct encounter with Chinese theatre much needed by him, especially with regard to the wish to apply the epic acting of Chinese theatre that he expressed one year before. It provided a readily available source he was to draw upon in his search for an appropriate style in his experimental epic theatre, and served as an important landmark in his development of the alienation effect. At the tea-party (or rather, a discussion session, held for a select group) during which Mei Lanfang, "without special lighting and wearing a dinner jacket, in an ordinary room full of specialists,"⁷⁴ demonstrated the elements of Chinese acting, Brecht observed that China's greatest master of drama could constantly keep a distance between himself, his character, and the spectator:

The artist's object is to appear strange and even surprising to the audience. [...] The performer's self-observation, an artful and artistic act of self-alienation, stopped the spectator from losing himself in the character completely, i.e., to the point of giving up his own identity, and lent a splendid remoteness to the events.⁷⁵

Brecht exclaimed:

Acting like this is healthier and in our view less unworthy of a thinking being; it demands a considerable knowledge of humanity and worldly wisdom, and a keen eye for what is socially important. In this case too there is of course a creative process at work; but it is a higher one, because it is raised to the conscious level.⁷⁶

Apart from the obvious tone of admiration here, what is implied by Brecht is that Mei Lanfang's "de-familiarizing" act of "self-observation" showed itself as an effective stage technique which prevented empathy and helped maintain emotional distance between the actor, the character portrayed and the spectator. If Brecht had had the same idea in his mind, it may not have been a fully accomplished one, as it

⁷⁴ Bertold Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Theatre", in *Brecht on Theatre*, p.94

⁷⁵ *ibid*, pp.92-93

⁷⁶ *ibid*, p.95

had not been raised to the same "conscious level" yet. However, since little is known of whether Brecht and Mei Lanfang directly exchanged ideas on this occasion, what Brecht might also implies is that Mei's performance, especially its theatricality and its innovative use of folk art in the eyes of the Western theatre directors and producers, seemed to have touched on theatrical principles which both men shared. We are still left to wonder how and why Brecht should have come up with the terminology of the alienation effect to refer to Mei's traditional Chinese acting technique and the similar method which he claimed he had been experimenting with in his non-Aristotelian epic theatre.⁷⁷

Quite a few Western scholars try to argue that Brecht's *Verfremdung* was derived from the Russian formalist critic Shklovsky's use of the term *ostranenie*. This is perhaps based on the fact that Shklovsky, in an interview with Vladimir Pozner, agreed that his concept of *ostranenie* came to Brecht by way of Tretiakov,⁷⁸ and is further supported by Bernhard Reich's recollection of the occasion when he first heard Brecht use the word *Verfremdung* in Tretiakov's Moscow apartment:

We spoke about a very unusual theatrical performance.[...] I referred to a certain detail of the production [Okhlopkov's staging of Pogodin's *Aristocrats*] and Tretiakov interjected: "Yes, that's a *Verfremdung*," and darted a conspiratorial glance at Brecht. Brecht nodded. That was my first acquaintance with the word *Verfremdung*. So I must assume that Brecht got this term from Tretiakov; I think that Tretiakov somewhat recast Shklovsky's term *otchuzhdenie* [I. M. Fradkin's substitution for *ostranenie*], "to distance," "to alienate."⁷⁹

The above evidence seems to suggest that the word, if not the entire concept of, *Verfremdung* can be related to the Russian source. However, as a poetic strategy,

⁷⁷ *ibid*, p.91

⁷⁸ Shklovsky's interview was published in *Les lettres françaises*, 31 December 1964 to 6 January 1965. For detailed bibliographical notes of studies in the field, see Katherine Bliss Eaton, *The Theatre of Meyerhold and Brecht*, p.44

⁷⁹ Quoted from Katherine Bliss Eaton, *The Theatre of Meyerhold and Brecht*, pp.21-22

Shklovsky's concept of *ostranenie* is concerned more with linguistic discourse than dramaturgy regarding stage performance.⁸⁰ The term was coined as early as 1917. In his essay "Art as a Device", Shklovsky uses the word to denote the transformation of "ordinary" perception into a poetically visionary one. The function of poetic art is to transfer what is depicted to the "sphere of new perception." He argues:

People living at the seashore grow so accustomed to the murmur of the waves that they never hear it. By the same token, we scarcely even hear the words which we utter. We look at each other, but we do not hear each other any more. Our perception of the world has withered away.⁸¹

Accordingly, the poet is called upon to counteract the inexorable pull of routine and habit and to destroy the verbal cliché and the stock response attendant upon it, thus forcing us into an elevated awareness of ordinary things. Drawing his examples from Leo Tolstoy, Shklovsky proves by implication that the device of "making strange" constitutes an omnipresent principle of imaginative literature.

However, to some other critics, such as Peter Brooker, the idea that Brecht was directly indebted to Shklovsky, or to Tretiakov, is "unconvincing".⁸² He also cites Bernhard Reich who, in his account of Brecht's shared use of the term *Verfremdung* and its connection with Shklovsky which John Willett accepts as proof of its derivation, points out that Brecht's concept differs fundamentally from this supposed source. Compared with the "extremely formal juxtaposition" of Shklovsky, Brecht's defamiliarizing the familiar, says Reich, "helps one to see better the content of things."⁸³ Brecht's concept and use of *Verfremdung* entailed a degree of socio-cultural as well as political insight which thoroughly radicalized the formalist device of

⁸⁰ For a discussion of the main notion of "foregrounding" as defined by such a terminology, see Josette Féral, "Alienation Theory in Multi-Media Performance", *Theatre Journal*, 39 (1987), pp.463-465

⁸¹ Quoted from Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism* (The Hague: Mouton, 1965), p.176

⁸² Peter Brooker, "Key Words in Brecht's Theory and Practice of Theatre", in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, p.192

⁸³ Quoted from Peter Brooker, *Bertolt Brecht: Dialectics, Poetry and Politics*, p.70

"making strange." Whereas by laying bare of a device, Shklovsky spoke of art as a process by which the world was rendered less familiar, a process used by the artist to construct the world as a vision rather than to paint it as an object to be recognized, Brecht, by adopting such a device, spoke of a literary concept which was linked to a special vision of the relation between society and art. It was what he called a *Realist* concept which aimed at

laying bare society's causal network / showing up the dominant viewpoint as the viewpoint of the dominators / writing from the standpoint of the class which has prepared the broadest solutions for the most pressing problems afflicting human society.⁸⁴

Renata Berg-Pam notes that, when Brecht visited Moscow in Spring, 1935, the concept of *ostranenie* was still in the air with the second impression of Shklovsky's book *On the Theory of Prose* in 1930 (first published in 1925), though formalism as an aesthetic philosophy was gradually losing ground during the years of socialist realism following the establishment of the Communist regime in Russia. She also confirms the story that it was through his acquaintance with Russian intellectuals, writers, and dramatists, particularly Tretiakov, that Brecht was brought into touch with the formalist idea of *ostranenie*.⁸⁵ However, judging from the fact that Brecht did not know Russian, we may wonder whether he, by listening to or discussing with his Russian colleagues, was eager to translate the terminology into German rather than for a better understanding of the concept to describe something which he seemed to have realized that he had been experimenting with in his own theatre, too.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Bertolt Brecht, "The Popular and the Realistic", in *Brecht on Theatre*, pp.107-115 (p.109)

⁸⁵ Renata Berg-Pam, *Bertolt Brecht and China*, p.163

⁸⁶ To substantiate this statement, although seemingly awkward in terms of translation, we should perhaps also look at another piece of evidence which has not been given due attention in the West so far. It also concerns Brecht's use of Shklovsky's term, by way of Tretiakov, in his comment on Mei's performance. On 14 April, 1935, in the auditorium of the All-Soviet Society for Cultural Relations with Abroad in Moscow a seminar exclusively on Peking Opera and Mei Lanfang's performance style was held, which was attended by some of the most prominent figures in theatre and film at the time,

including Denchenko, Stanislavsky, Eisenstein, Meyerhold, Gordon Craig, Brecht, Tretiakov, Piscator, and so on. Among the praise accorded and technical discussions on the classical Chinese theatre, the speech made by Brecht was the longest and perhaps the most controversial, too, as it was contested by Eisenstein and further defended by Brecht, which broke the order of speeches. Apart from elaborating on his idea of epic theatre, which could be enriched by the practice of Chinese theatre, Brecht concentrated on the technique of self-alienation used by Mei in his impersonation of female roles. Before he emphasized the instructive values of the alienation effect in Chinese acting, by which he believed Western theatre could be taught how to observe the surprising side of whatsoever that was described as natural and taken for granted, Brecht talked about how he acquainted himself with the Russian formalists' theory in this respect:

During my last visit to Moscow, I had the opportunity to talk to Tretiakov and those friends of his in literary criticism. I began to realize that Russian scholars had already developed a new concept, which can be used to replace those modern aesthetics of the decaying Aristotelian concepts. Such a concept, forgive my incorrect Russian pronunciation, is *Ostranenie*. In the new German theatre, we try to use the term of *Verfremdung*, which more or less alters the meaning of the concept held by the Russian scholars.

Apart from an overall impression of Brecht making a rapid application the moment he seized the word, a closer look at the above quotation enables us to see that there are several things left unsaid. Firstly, Brecht did not seem to have bothered with any precise translation of the terminology as he admitted that it was different from the original. Secondly, Brecht tried to deny that the Russian concept came to him as something new by saying that there was more or less an equivalent of it in the new German theatre. Thirdly, and most importantly, the adoption of the terminology was occasioned by the discussion of Mei Lanfang, and was used to describe Chinese acting which Brecht believed to be useful to Western theatre. What is suggested here is that Brecht, as a great borrower, might have been too shrewd to give the entire credit to Mei, not to mention the Russian formalists.

The English text used here is the writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

Wo zai shangci fangwen mosike qijian, cengjing you jihui tong telaijieyakaofu tongzhi yiji ta naxie wenxue pinglunjie pengyou jiaotang. Wo kaishi renshi dao sulian xuezhe yijing zhankai yizhong xinde guandian. Zhezhong guandian keyi gi yunyong dao nazhong yinggai qudai chengfu de yalishiduode gainian de xiandai meixue li qu. Zhege guandian, shu wode eyu fayin bu zhunque, shi "Ostranenie." Zai deguo xin xiju li, women shiyong "moshenghua" huo "jianlihua" zhege shuyu, tongshi zhe ye duoduoshao shao gaibian liao sulian xuezhe nage gainian de neihan.

It is taken from Mei Shaowu, trans., "On Peking Opera and Mei Lanfang's Acting" ("Lun Jingju he Mei Lanfang Biaoyan Yishu"), in *Collected Essays on Mei Lanfang's Art (Mei Lanfang Yishu Pinglun Ji)*, [n. ed.] (Beijing: Chinese Theatre Press, 1990), pp.710-743 (p.734). A complete record of the seminar was transcribed by a Swedish professor in 1986, and was given to Mei Lanfang's son Mei

That the idea of Brecht's association with the Russian formalists in the formulation of the alienation effect is not entirely justified can also be argued on account of some other important factors which we should take into consideration. Firstly, Reich's recollection of the occasion when he first heard the use of the term *Verfremdung* occurred in the context of the discussion between Tretiakov and Brecht on Okhlopkov's production of *Aristocrats*, with particular reference to the property men who supplied the actors with the necessary stage objects or carried out stage effects in full view of the audience.⁸⁷ This production, as has been discussed earlier, shows the director's indebtedness to Chinese theatre. Tretiakov must have been aware of this and could have been merely comparing such a device with Shklovsky's similar idea. Secondly, as Peter Brooker notes, to the dismay of those critics who believe in Brecht's connection with Russian formalists, Reich goes on in his *Memoir* not to equate but to distinguish between Brecht's and Shklovsky's use of the supposedly common term by saying that "despite the semantic similarity Brecht's conception differs from this quite fundamentally both with regard to its point of departure and its result."⁸⁸ And furthermore, in the Russian edition of his book, Reich omitted the whole passage about the discussion between Tretiakov and Brecht, an obvious attempt to disassociate Brecht from the Russian formalists.⁸⁹ Thirdly, as Marjorie L. Hoover observes, the term *otchuzhdenie* (literally *Entfremdung*) in the Reich's passage, as quoted earlier, was actually a substitution for *ostranenie*, used by I. M. Fradkin to counter the allusions to the Russian formalist source of *ostranenie* by quoting Shklovsky's French interview, another obvious Russian attempt to

Baojiu. Another son of Mei's, Mei Shaowu, translated it into Chinese in March, 1988, to commemorate Mei's 95th anniversary.

⁸⁷ See Marjorie L. Hoover, "Brecht's Soviet Connection Tretiakov", p.46

⁸⁸ Peter Brooker, *Bertolt Brecht*, pp.69-70

⁸⁹ See Marjorie L. Hoover, "Brecht's Soviet Connection Tretiakov", p.44. Reich's *Im Wettlauf mit der Zeit* was published by Henschelverlag (Berlin) in 1970; the Russian version *Vena-Berlin-Moskva-Berlin* by Iskusstvo (Moscow) in 1972.

differentiate Brecht from the infamous formalist device.⁹⁰ Therefore, it seems safe to accept Peter Brooker's conclusion that Brecht's meeting with Tretiakov and the exchange of the word *Verfremdung* was "incidental rather than decisive."⁹¹

Fradkin's use of the term *otchuzhdenie* appears to point at another source to which Brecht's theory of the alienation effect might also be related, that is, the Hegelian and particularly Marxist concept of *Entfremdung*, the normal German word for alienation or estrangement. This further possible theoretical source requires some attention, as one might be tempted to argue that as Brecht began to study Marxism during the 1920s, he might have been familiar enough with the concept of "alienation" before he encountered the Russian formalism or Chinese acting.

Brecht's use of the term, *Entfremdung*, not *Verfremdung*, as used by Hegel and Marx, appears in "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction", an essay which, perhaps written about 1936, was published posthumously in 1957.⁹² He would have been aware of its important place in Hegel's work, and its application by Marx to the condition of the proletariat under capitalism. However, the Hegelian concept of alienation is a dialectical one in that the philosopher regards it as a positive as well as a negative thing, and perhaps even a necessary thing in the history of human evolution. Hegel proved the power of negative thinking, as positive thinking may blur distinctions, dissolves meaning in a perhaps inspiring fog. In order to see a picture clearly, one must step away from it to come closer to seeing it. The dramatic quality of Hegelian dialectics, the coexistence of opposites, the merging of thesis and

⁹⁰ I. M. Fradkin's *Bertolt Brecht. Put' i metod* was published by "Nauka" (Moscow) in 1965, in which, apart from the term *otchuzhdenie* that he used as early as 1956 in his insistence that Brecht's *priem otchuzhdeniia* (*die Methode der Entfremdung*) has nothing in common with *ostranenie*, the author devises still another term *otdalenie* (literally *Entfernung*) when he translates Shklovsky from French into Russian, though the former term is commonly accepted in English translation nowadays. See *ibid*, pp.44-45

⁹¹ Peter Brooker, *Bertolt Brecht*, p.69

⁹² See editor's note to Bertolt Brecht, "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction", in *Brecht on Theatre*, pp.69-77 (p.76))

antithesis was something that Brecht harked back to more and more during the late stage of his dramatic career when he tried to redefine his epic theatre as dialectical theatre.⁹³

Marx's theme of alienation can be found mainly in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (first published in Berlin in 1932) where he seeks to expose the appalling phenomenon of human beings' loss of social relations with each other, and especially loss of control over their own products under the conditions of dehumanized labour. It is very likely that Brecht knew about Marx's discussion of such a social and economical phenomenon, as he also talked about, when he was commenting on Mei Lanfang's acting, the environment as "something remarkably inhuman; it exists in fact apart from Man, confronting him as a coherent whole."⁹⁴ However, Brecht maintained that his epic theatre of *Verfremdung* was dialectical theatre which did not view human relations as historically specific or deterministic, but was a description of the way art "by its *own* means" could "further the great social task of mastering life."⁹⁵ Unlike Marx who expounded his theory of alienation because it was not obvious, taken for granted, Brecht wanted to achieve the alienation effect in his theatre, a technical device deployed in order to bring audiences to recognize the strangeness of social conditions that they took for granted, to arouse

⁹³ Martin Esslin argues that, although Brecht later went so far as to regard Hegel as the greatest among all the philosophers in terms of comic talent, his ideas about the "epic" theatre ante-date his discovery of the dialectic. Martin Esslin, *Brecht: A Choice of Evils* (London: Methuen, 1959; 4th rev. edn, 1984; repr. 1985), p.152

⁹⁴ Bertolt Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting", in *Brecht on Theatre*, p.97. Apart from this evidence of Brecht's early reference to "alienation" as a general condition under capitalism, Peter Brooker also cites his talk of the poems in *Hauspostille* as a record of the "dehumanization," and use of "alienation" in a recognisably Hegelian-Marxist sense in a reference to Kafka as being terrified by "the thought of men being alienated from themselves by the forms of their life in society." Peter Brooker, *Bertolt Brecht*, p.79

⁹⁵ Bertolt Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting", in *Brecht on Theatre*, p.96

their will to alienate alienation. Thus it is suggested by some critics that it was an echo but not a direct derivation of *Verfremdung* when Brecht used *Entfremdung*.⁹⁶

Similarly, Brecht's attempt to create a Marxist aesthetics of theatre, whether partly echoing Marx's theory of alienation or not, was predated by his search for and discovery of new forms and representational style. As early as 1920, Brecht notes:

I hunt around for new forms and experiment with my feelings just like the very latest writers. But then I keep coming back to the fact that the essence of art is simplicity, grandeur and sensitivity, and that of its form coolness.⁹⁷

In another entry in his early diaries, Brecht also relates that his own instinct guided him towards creating the effect of alienating acting long before that Marxist-sounding term was invented:

⁹⁶ See note 7 above. As "alienation" is a proper translation of the Heglian and Marxist *Entfremdung*, Peter Brooker also argues that it is an inadequate and misleading translation of Brecht's *Verfremdung* by John Willett. He suggests the terms "defamiliarization" or "estrangement," or an even better term "de-alienation."

Michael Patterson holds the same opinion, but thinks that *Verfremdung* might be probably best rendered in English as "distanciation." See Michael Patterson, "Brecht's Legacy", in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, pp.273-287 (p.274)

For a more detailed discussion on the difference between Marxist "alienation" and Brecht's technique, see Frederic Ewen, *Bertolt Brecht: His Life, His Art and His Times*, pp.219-224, where *Entfremdung* is believed to explain how a man loses relation to the product of his labours and becomes a mentally and physically dehumanized, self-conscious and self-acting commodity, and *Verfremdung* is interpreted as an estrangement method to historicize and consider people and incidents as historically conditioned and transitory.

Arrigo Subiotto argues that Marxist "alienation" envisages human beings only in a specific historical context and is thus a rigid mechanistic view which may lead to behaviouristic, socio-economic determinism, while Brecht's method deals with the complex reactions of people to their situation and fellow human beings which are rich in contrast and defy resolution by causal explanations of society. See Arrigo Subiotto, "Epic Theatre: A Theatre for the Scientific Age", in *Brecht in Perspective*, ed. by Graham Bartram and Antony Waine (London: Longman, 1982), pp.30-44 (pp.41-42)

⁹⁷ Bertolt Brecht, *Diaries 1920-1922*, ed. by Herta Ramthun; trans. by John Willett (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979) pp.4-5

There is one common artistic error which I hope I've avoided in *Baal* and *Jungle*, that of trying to carry people away. Instinctively I've kept my distance and ensured that the stage realization of my (political and philosophical) effects remains within bounds. The spectator's "splendid isolation" is left intact, it is not *sua res quae agitur*; he is not fobbed off with an invitation to feel sympathetically, to fuse with the hero and cut a meaningful and indestructible figure while watching himself in two simultaneous versions, from whatever is different, amazing, impossible to take in as a whole.⁹⁸

Judging from such relevant contents of his early diaries, and also the early examples of his practice of theatre, which Brecht might have been thinking in his denial of Chinese "influence" prior to his second trip to Moscow, there is small wonder that some critics should defend Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* as his own independent invention.⁹⁹ Jacob Geis, a friend of Brecht's, who directed the important 1926 Darmstadt première of *A Man's Man*, commented on the production methods which were intended

to show the play's underlying sense by making the surface meaning as clear as possible. In other words, no implications, hidden meanings, ambiguities, half-light; but facts, brilliant illumination, light into every corner, absence of feeling, no humour with tears to fall back on. The theatre as craft rather than art, no private issues---these should emerge only secondarily, as self-evident.¹⁰⁰

Geis's comment, which was made in 1926, suggests that *Verfremdung* started to serve, at a very early stage, as an analytic and politically motivated technique to lay bare the contradictions of social conditions. It suggests, too, as Peter Brooker puts it, that this

⁹⁸ *ibid*, p.159

⁹⁹ Frederic Ewen suggests that Brecht's theory was "fully developed," in spirit if not in the letter, before 1935. See Frederic Ewen, *Bertolt Brecht: His Life, His Art and His Times* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1970), p.224, p.225; Keith A. Dickson quotes I. M. Fradkin's similar ideas in his *Towards Utopia: A Study of Brecht* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), p.244

¹⁰⁰ Quoted from Michael Patterson, *The Revolution in German Theatre*, p.160

"alienation effect" was already in embryo in the 1920s, and was already compatible with Brecht's "mature" theory, regardless of later events and conversations.¹⁰¹

Such a suggestion is made even clearer by Walter Benjamin, another close friend of Brecht's, who argued, in his 1934 essay "The Author as Producer", that through employment of techniques of interruptions as well as gestic acting, Brecht set out to "alienate the audience in a lasting manner, through thought, from the conditions in which it lives," not by reproducing them, but disclosing or uncovering them.¹⁰² This is a more direct description of the alienation effect than that made by Geis, and shows that in both theory and practice *Verfremdungseffekt*, for which Brecht was to become famous or notorious, was already evident to Benjamin's understanding.

Such kind of suggestion made by these German contemporaries of Brecht's regarding the latter's early development of the alienation effect theory makes it necessary for us to turn back to the playwright's early works or practice of theatre. In some of Brecht's early plays there are some examples of the use of what he later was to call the "technique of alienation." In *Drums in the Night*, the action is interrupted, the audience is addressed directly, the theatricality of the theatre is made explicit, authorial commentary is provided in the form of placards bearing slogans. Similar deliberate interruption of action can also be found in *A Man's a Man* where, when Galy Gay is transformed step by step from a peaceable citizen into a ferocious warrior, armed to the teeth and thirsting for blood, one of the characters advances to inform the audience of the author's intentions. *The Threepenny Opera*, which also shows abundant use of placards, sees the technique of the alienation effect developed to a further step: the scene depends for its effect not on the direct participation of the audience in the happenings on stage, which are deliberately acted out, but by their reacting to them and remembering more forcefully the true state of things. *The Measures Taken*, has each of the four characters alternatively playing the young

¹⁰¹ Peter Brooker, *Bertolt Brecht*, p.78

¹⁰² Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, trans. by Anna Bostock (London: Verso, 1983), pp.100-

comrade to be executed, indicating his representativeness and restraining the audience from their customary emotional self-identification.

Judging from these early examples of Brecht's technique of the alienation, we can see that they appear to be restricted to mainly relying on the use of placards or projections to interrupt the acting of the play and convey the author's intention (a technique recalling Piscator's theatre), and on the use of self-introduction of the characters (a technique reminiscent of the traditional Chinese theatre). If these examples can be regarded as an embodiment of Brecht's concept of the alienation effect, one has to analyze them according to the schematized theories laid down in the essays such as those listed above, which Brecht wrote a few years later after he had found corroborative evidence in Chinese acting for his use of the terminology. In any case, as has been stated earlier, Brecht's contact with Mei Lanfang's art is to be seen as a milestone in the development of his alienation theory, marking the stage when his admiration for Mei's style of acting seemed to have effected aesthetic-theatrical changes in his theatre to an extent where his previous "similar" practice was raised to such a "conscious level" that he started to theorize it. This is shown by the note which he wrote in pencil to the essay "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting".¹⁰³ In the prologue to "A Short Organum for the Theatre", Brecht also seems to admit this by saying:

The following sets out to define an aesthetic drawn from a particular kind of theatrical performance which has been worked out in practice over the past few decades. In the theoretical statements, excursions, technical indications occasionally published in the form of notes to the writer's plays, aesthetics have only been touched on casually and with comparative lack of interest.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Brecht wrote: "This essay arose out of a performance by Mei Lan-fang's company in Moscow in spring 1935." See the editor's note to Bertolt Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Theatre", in *Brecht on Theatre*, p.99

¹⁰⁴ Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre", in *Brecht on Theatre*, pp.179-205 (p.179)

Brecht's receptivity to influences from all sides, his ability to give expression to every reaction with swift immediacy, cannot be anything else than impressive.¹⁰⁵ Although in his articles he never mentions anything about any possible Russian relation to his concept of the alienation effect, while merely citing the example of Chinese theatre practice, his second visit to Moscow, during which he had discussions with his Russian friends and attended Mei's performance and the subsequent seminar on it, may have realized his idea of an anti-illusionistic drama for an audience who neither wished nor expected to be hypnotized by the actors. To Brecht, traditional Chinese theatre arts, as represented by Mei Lanfang, provided a fine corroborative example for him to follow with his theory of the alienation effect. He started to use it for his own purpose, a purpose that can be perhaps best described in his own phrasing: "to drop the assumption that there is a fourth wall cutting the audience off from the stage and the consequent illusion that the stage acting is taking place in reality and without an audience."¹⁰⁶

However, Brecht's impression of Chinese acting as well as his subsequent modifications of his theatre aesthetics leaves us to wonder whether he did not mistake an historically developed situation for something merely technical which could be transplanted without its original situation into Western theatre, for there are quite a few incorrect points in his observation and he is sometimes even charged with an

¹⁰⁵ Carl Weber makes a precise summary of this when he points out that Brecht exploited, "like a quarry," the otherness of foreign theatre traditions where he found content and forms from which to construct his own works. Brecht welded whatever he had adopted with his own experimentation, appropriating dramaturgic models from England's Elizabethans, classical Indian, and Japan's *no* theatre, employing motifs and structures from Villon, Kipling, Synge, lifting content from American stories as well as from Russian novels, and absorbing performance modes from early Hollywood films and techniques of classical Chinese drama in his own theory of epic theatre. See Carl Weber, "AC/TC: Current of Theatrical Exchange", in *Interculturalism & Performance*, p.32

¹⁰⁶ Bertolt Brecht, "Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect", in *Brecht on Theatre*, p.136

"intentional will to misunderstanding."¹⁰⁷ To me, as the following discussion seeks to show, apart from the minor mistakes which Brecht made in interpreting Chinese acting, there are two major aspects in his observation which he got fundamentally wrong. Firstly, he had his eyes only for the self-alienation of the actor, i.e. the emotional distance the actor appeared to keep between himself and the character portrayed, but failed to see that the actor needed self-identification from time to time, i.e. appropriately getting into the character so that a real, or near life-like image was presented in a play that was supposedly not true of real life. Secondly, he made a wrong interpretation of why the actor should try to be remote from the character, believing his object to be "appearing strange and even surprising to the audience." He mistakenly thought that the traditional Chinese theatre also aimed at achieving an alienation effect. Based on these fundamental misunderstandings, Brecht equated Chinese performance with his idea of alienation effect.

The similarities between Mei's system and the Brechtian system mainly lie in the following two aspects:

Firstly, in terms of the distance maintained between life created on stage and that of reality, mutual resemblance can be discovered in both systems. The Brechtian system objects to creating real life on stage, advocates the breakdown of the fourth wall and stage illusions, and aims at widening the distance between life on stage and life in reality. Similarly, there is never any notion of the fourth wall in Mei's system, nor is there any attempt to create an illusion of life. The real life presented on stage is never a truthful or realistic presentation, but a symbolic or hypothetical representation. The distance between stage life and real life is always great, and such a distance is maintained from the beginning to the end of a play.

¹⁰⁷ Oscar Büdel, "Contemporary Theatre and Aesthetic Distance", in *Brecht: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Peter Demetz (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1962; 2nd pr. 1963), pp.59-85 (p.77)

Secondly, the similarities between Mei's art and Brechtian theatre can be discovered in their similar structures of action. The epic structure adopted by Brecht (to be discussed in Chapter II) is a free division of scenes which are interwoven, from time to time, with actors' comment on the play, reading out stage directions, use of projections, films, screen titles and placards, etc. Such a method leads to discontinuity of action and hence breaks the cause-and-effect development of the plot. The division of actions in Mei's system is also free, and the actions can be disrupted from time to time. The methods through which such an effect is engendered fall into three main categories:

1) *Zibaojiamen* (self-introduction) which often appears in the prelude, in the form of verse or monologue which the actor sings or speaks. The actor relates to the audience who he is, where he is from, what he does, and where he is now (i.e. the setting of the play). So self-introduction tells the audience what is going to happen in the following scene, or act, or even the whole play.

2) *Dabeigon* (speaking aside or singing aside) which involves an actor, who supposes that the other figure(s) on the stage cannot see or hear him, tells the audience about his mental activities, or, sometimes, what he thinks about the other character(s).

3) *Chakedahun*, i.e. the jokes or humorous remarks the character uses intermittently in his speeches or songs to provoke laughter.

In the case of any one of the above three types, the action of a play can be disrupted, and the natural fluidity of the structure broken, which may also result in a free division of scenes.

Given the apparent similarities in the aspects of remoteness between stage life and real life and frequent disruption of actions, the concept of the alienation effect applies to both Mei's system and the Brechtian system. However, the alienation effect achieved in each system is quite different. Firstly, in Brecht's theatre, actors may act on the stage in a near life-like fashion, yet their inner feeling must be quite different from that of the characters portrayed. They are not to identify themselves with the

characters. Instead, they must psychologically place themselves in the opposite position of the characters, so that they can always remain sober minded and criticize them by relying on their own reason. This acting style is somewhat similar to the performing art of Chinese *Pingsu* (telling and commenting on a story in a half speaking, half singing fashion, to the accomplishment of a few musical instruments and a small drum) where the actor does not mentally identify himself with the character(s) in the story, and the act of imitation is always followed by comment made by him from the third person point of view. Just as the victim of a malicious attack by some half-drunken hooligans describes and imitates the particular act of how they attacked him, he does not necessarily re-experience the event. What he aims at, through imitation, is to comment, or invite people to comment, on the incident.

Quite different from the Brechtian system, in Mei's theatre, the actors act in a fashion that is remote from real life. They do not aim at imitating the natural form of life. On the contrary, this system transforms, exaggerates and beautifies it, so much so that it assumes the characteristics of artful dancing, free and yet regularized, ethereal and yet rhythmical. To put it more precisely, Mei's art depends very much on those forms of acting which transcend their antitheses in the natural movements of physical activities of human beings. Apart from this, Mei's theatre encourages actors to get into characters under appropriate circumstances. Under Mei's system, actors need to appropriately convert themselves into the characters from time to time, but they must remain sober minded and keep their power of reason at the same time. It is the dialectical effect of both self-alienation and self-identification that serves as one of the top principles in Mei's art.

Secondly, to create the alienation effect is a very conscious attempt in Brecht's theatre. It purposefully estranges actors' possible empathy with characters and forces actors to move directly from presentation to criticism. It also purposefully destroys the audience's empathy with figures portrayed and forces them to change their attitudes, from emotional admiration into rational reflections. Mei's art, in comparison, is governed by a quite different principle. Its object is not to alienate

actors from characters. On the contrary, it requires actors to get into figures portrayed while maintaining self-control. It is never its intention to force the audience to stop admiring stage characters and to use their reason to think about them instead. As discussed above, the alienation effect is created in Mei's system chiefly on account of the remoteness between stage life and actual life, and the disrupted action of the play. But such an effect is by no means purposefully created by the actors on stage. It is not an objective or conscious attempt. It is rendered subjectively or subconsciously by those acting formulae or stylized acting conventions which have always been an indispensable part of the traditional Chinese theatre ever since it first appeared.

Thirdly, while the objective of Brecht's theatre is to be morally instructive, to enlighten people's reason, with particular attention paid to good as opposed to evil, Mei's theatre also prompts people to think. Yet they think more of the form, and what concerns them most is how to negotiate the remoteness or the estrangement between those highly transformed acting formulae and the realistic movements of natural life. When Chinese audiences go to their own theatre to watch a play, they are brought into direct contact with those artistic performance techniques which seem remote from what they are familiar with in real life. What do they signify? How are they related to the creation of the images of the stage characters? An understanding may enhance their enjoyment of the play. In the past, when traditional Chinese dramas were often staged in tea-houses or market-places, it was not unusual to see some real connoisseurs who rushed in at a particular point during the progress of a performance just to watch what they thought was the best display of artfulness by an actor. As to those who did stay throughout the whole performance, they were more often than not attracted to some particular aspects of the art, for instance, songs and music. As Mei Lanfang recalls,

During those days when people went to the theatre, they said that they were going to *listen to* a play. If they had said that they were going to *watch* a play, they would have been laughed at as laymen. Some of the audience would simply close their eyes, whenever there began songs after songs, tapping their hands to the rhythm and carefully chewing

every single word, sound, and variation of tune produced by the actor.¹⁰⁸

As was correctly discerned by Brecht, one of the most important characteristics of the traditional Chinese theatre which differentiates it from the European stage in Brecht's time, lies in the non-existence of a fourth wall besides the three surrounding it. While the illusionist theatre convention still prevailed in the West at the turn of the century, the Chinese counterparts, from distant times down to the present, fully assert the hypothetical nature of theatre arts, or, the theatricality of the theatre, acknowledging the actors' awareness of being watched by the audience. According to traditional Chinese theatre aesthetics, a stage performance can never be a photographic reproduction of real life where events making up the story portrayed on stage take place. If a theatrical portrayal of events and characters sometimes still has to appeal to some basic human sentiments and reasons, as logically required in real life, it does not aim at creating illusions which the audience may be induced to link with real life. The main emphasis of the theatre lies in an aesthetic experience, enabled by the creation of an aesthetic time in which actual everyday gestural conventions and the rules of temporality do not apply. It is a poetic style which combines music, lyrical verse and elements of narrative, as governed by an aesthetic of physical movement strongly influenced by the stylization of principles of dance. If images of everyday life are still created in the mind's eye of the spectator, it is at a subconscious level, expressed not through an aesthetically sophisticated form but with stylized naturalist gesture.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Mei Lanfang, *My Forty-Year Stage Life (Wutai Shenghuo Sishi Nian)*, 3 vols (Beijing: Chinese Theatre Press, 1987), I, p.26. The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

Nashi guanzhong shang xiyuan, du cheng tingxi, ruguo shuo shi kanxi, jiu hui you ren xiao ta shi waihang liao. Youxie guanzhong, yudao taishang daduan changgong, suxing bishang yanjing, shouli pai zhe banyan, xixi de jujue yanyuan de yiqiangyidiao, yiziyiyin.

¹⁰⁹ See Antony Tatlow, "Social Space and Aesthetic time---East Asian Theatre: Transcultural Challenge", *Theatre Research International*, 8 (1983), 208-219 (p.214)

Tao-Ching Hsü argues that "all dramatic representation involves conventions, and the realistic theatre is no exception. Convention is merely the understood allowable disparity between the dramatic representation and reality and it is ineradicable because no theatre can be exactly like real life."¹¹⁰ Almost in every respect the traditional Chinese theatre is opposite to the realistic theatre, chiefly due to its stage conventions, or acting formulae, which alienate actors from the characters portrayed. Thus, it cannot be judged by the standards of realism. Brecht certainly did not choose to judge it that way. He viewed it in the light of his epic theatre, in the light of alienation effects which he was endeavouring to create therein. His feeling of coldness in Mei's demonstration arose from the artist's well-controlled portrayal of incidents of utmost passion by going through a series of acting conventions. To Brecht, those conventions were like a ritual. "There is nothing eruptive about it," he says. "It is quite clearly somebody else's repetition of the incident: a representation, even though an artistic one."¹¹¹

Brecht's understanding of Chinese theatre's unrealistic nature led him to resent the fact that its alienation effects might misfire for the Western spectators. He noted:

When Mei Lanfang was playing a death scene a spectator sitting next me exclaimed with astonishment at one of his gestures. One or two people sitting in front of us turned round indignantly and sshhh'd. They behaved as if they were present at the real death of a real girl. Possibly their attitude would have been all right for a European production, but for a Chinese it was unspeakably ridiculous. In their case the A-effect had misfired.¹¹²

However, one must add that, in circumstances like this, the alienation effect would also misfire for Chinese spectators, who more often than not react emotionally to the sad scenes depicted on their stage. The American scholar L. C. Arlington

¹¹⁰ Tao-Ching Hsü, *The Chinese Conception of the Theatre* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), p.313

¹¹¹ Bertolt Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting", in *Brecht on Theatre*, p.95

¹¹² *ibid*, p.93

observed in the early decades of the century, through his fifty-year long encounter with Chinese theatre practitioners: "It is quite a common thing to see grown-ups, men and women, snivelling and holding their sleeves or handkerchiefs to really moist eyes in a theatre."¹¹³

Brecht's direct contact with Chinese theatre enabled him to look at the concept of the alienation effect in his epic theatre on a conscious level. Yet such a contact was so brief that he still remained, on a large scale, unfamiliar with the complexities of the Chinese stage. Apart from the two apparent minor mistakes he made in interpreting Mei's demonstration, namely, he believed the little pennants carried on a general's shoulder in Chinese theatre to correspond to the number of regiments under his command, which is in fact invariably four in number carried by any general, whether in command of a larger army or a smaller one, and he mistook the female role which Mei impersonated at the tea-party to be the wife of the fisherman instead of the daughter, it was too hasty a conclusion for Brecht to make that a Chinese spectator would be so alienated from characters pathetically presented and would laugh at anyone who behaved otherwise. As Leonard Cabell Pronko points out, "The unfamiliar always causes us to focus our attention on the exterior until we are capable of going beyond it to the emotions within."¹¹⁴ Brecht's mind seemed to be too occupied with the notion of alienation effect. He could not go beyond it to notice, or he just chose to ignore, the irresistible empathetic power general audiences may also be seized with from time to time.

For an actor "to act real so as to give his audience a sense of reality" was by no means an exceptional principle for Mei Lanfang's theatre.¹¹⁵ However, as a great

¹¹³ L. C. Arlington, *The Chinese Drama: From the Earliest Times until Today* (New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1966), p.13

¹¹⁴ Leonard Cabell Pronko, *Theatre East and West: Perspective Toward a Total Theatre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p.57

¹¹⁵ Mei Lanfang, *Mei Lanfang on Theatre (Mei Lanfang Xiju Sanlun)* (Beijing: Chinese People's Press, 1959), p.36. The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Gi guanzhong yizhong zhenshi de ganjue."

innovator of the traditional Chinese theatre arts of modern times, Mei never intended his theatre to be artificially sentimental. He knew very well how to apply subtle feelings wherever required and was most successful in letting his audience feel the excitement of experiencing those feelings as engendered by his performance. Two of Mei's most popular plays, and also his own favourites, were *Drunken Beauty* (*Guifi Zuijiu*) and *Cosmos Point* (*Yuzhou Feng*). The first depicts the feelings and emotions of Lady Yang, one of the four most famous legendary Chinese beauties, the favourite concubine of a Tang Dynasty emperor, as she makes herself drunk in despair at being spurned, following a series of pleasurable anticipations. The second depicts a beautiful girl who feigns madness to avoid marrying a tyrannical emperor, and the actor needs to make the girl's father, who arranges the marriage, see that she is mad while letting the audience understand that she is sane. The plots of both plays are simple, the written texts are at points extremely sparse, laconic, yet the pleasurableness, the despair, and the drunkenness, the sanity and insanity all require the most delicate portrayal of highly complex emotions if they are not to seem farcical. Mei's successful acting of both roles was a testimony to his mastery of the art of acting of this kind.

The mimetic artistry of Mei's theatre was equally appreciated by Western connoisseurs of Chinese theatre. The spectators at the tea-party in Moscow were attracted to it, even if one of them, i.e. Brecht, devoted his attention to something else. Several years before, in 1930, Mei had already overwhelmed the Americans with the excitement of being seized with the powerful feelings which he brought forth in his stylized acting. The first play he put on during his American tour was *Killing the Tiger General* (*Zhen-e Ci Hu*). Mei played the major female role of a valiant court lady who replaces an imperial princess given in betrothal to the rebel Tiger General in order to kill him and avenge the fall of the Imperial House. After beguiling the man into drunkenness in the bedchamber, she stabs him to death and then takes her own life. It is a play that calls for a good deal of singing combined with conventional expressions and gestures. The last long song which the lady sings as she fears the

soldiers, shame, and death before she cuts her throat with a sword and falls lifeless, is the most emotional of all, heightening the grandiose style of the drama to the utmost. Mei performed this scene with such skill, tempo and agility that he immediately won the unanimous praise and admiration from those critics who attended the show. Stark Young records his impression of the death scene as follows:

I am shaken with an excitement that is curiously stronger than I am likely to get from any mere photographic portrayal of death and horror and is yet at the same time vaguer and more exalted; and then gradually the points that are important to me, and greatly so to our Western theatre, begin to range themselves in my mind.¹¹⁶

Traditional Chinese dramatic art, with its stories and characters almost known to all in China, is more concerned with the performance itself, its quality and progress. Like other theatres, it cannot always dispense with the search for resemblance, for being true to life and the actual world. This leads to the establishment of conventions, or acting formulae, which are largely stylizations of actual conditions of place and action. However, the art of such stylizations is governed by the intention that everything employed in it---action, facial expression, voice, movement, place and so on---is to be subordinated to result in a work which is in itself an entity wholly ideal, not realistic.

As Leonard Cabell Pronko points out, Chinese theatre has unfortunately caused a fair amount of "mis-comprehension and mis-interpretation in the West."¹¹⁷ His claim seems valid when we consider the difficulty of communicating across cultural boundaries. But his implied evaluation of misunderstanding and mis-reading, which he assumes as undesirable activities, cannot be entirely acceptable, for these "negative" activities may be the creative means by which cross-cultural exchange takes place.

¹¹⁶ Stark Young, "Mei Lan-fang", *Theatre Arts Monthly*, 14 (1930), 295-308 (p.298)

¹¹⁷ Leonard Cabell Pronko, *Theatre East and West*, p.35

Brecht's alienation effect appears to be a product of nothing more than his "misunderstanding" of Chinese stage conventions. To escape his own dramatic tradition, or to strengthen his anti-illusionistic stance, Brecht looked to the classical Chinese theatre tradition for an enriched space of imagination. His notion of the alienation effect was inspired by his own version of reading the Chinese performing arts, which led to a modification of his theory and practice of theatre.

Firstly, Brecht's evolving theory of empathy, which underwent changes several times in his writings, can be related to his observation of Mei Lanfang's acting. In an early interview with Bernard Guillemin in 1926, Brecht first announced his idea about an epic theatre which was identified with reason as opposed to empathy, proposing that the portrayal of character was not a matter for empathy but for understanding.¹¹⁸ This began to change as he became more selective about the emotions he wanted to arouse. In early 1935 he wrote that his epic theatre would not simply eliminate emotional effects, rather, it would clarify emotions in it.¹¹⁹ He started to reinterpret Aristotle's "catharsis" as "clarification," and expand the concept of empathy to extend away from emotions, characters, and even actions, towards the act of performance itself.¹²⁰ In 1949 Brecht further modified his concept of empathy by encouraging his audience to empathize with *the acting of the role*, and provoking in them an "attitude of criticism" to "arouse or reinforce" emotions.¹²¹ His final opinion on empathy appeared in a posthumous appendix to "A Short Organum for the Theatre" where acting, linked with demonstration, was opposed to experience and empathy. While he believed that the actor of his epic theatre could not exclude all tendencies towards experience and empathy, even if he should try to do so in his acting and demonstration, he tried to fuse the two pairs of "mutually hostile processes," or, in his

¹¹⁸ Bertolt Brecht, "Conversation with Bert Brecht", in *Brecht on Theatre*, pp.15-16

¹¹⁹ Bertolt Brecht, "Indirect Impact of the Epic Theatre", in *Brecht on Theatre*, pp.57-62 (p.58)

¹²⁰ Timothy J. Wiles, *The Theatre Event: Modern Theories of Performance* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p.77

¹²¹ Bertolt Brecht, "Formal Problems Arising from the Theatre's New Content", in *Brecht on Theatre*, pp.226-230 (p.227)

own words, "experience and portrayal, empathy and demonstration, justification and criticism," a fusion with a result of desirable showing of contradiction.¹²²

Among these four distinctive stages of Brecht's evolving theory of empathy briefly summarized above, his response to Mei Lanfang's acting served as an important link. While he started to realize in 1936 that emotions could not be totally dispensed with in his epic theatre, a modification of his early belief in reason as opposed to empathy, he noted that the "artful and artistic act of self-alienation" in Chinese theatre did not entirely reject the spectator's empathy. He confirmed that "the audience identifies itself with the actor as being an observer, and accordingly develops his attitude of observing or looking on."¹²³ This "attitude of observing or looking on" clearly had its echo in the "attitude of criticism," an idea which Brecht maintained in 1949 in his dialogue with Friedrich Wolf, although he believed that it was also counteracted by the ritualistic acting involving conventionalized gestures and movements to present feelings.¹²⁴ Brecht admitted that his epic theatre

by no means renounces emotion, least of all the sense of justice, the urge to freedom, and righteous anger; it is so far from renouncing these that it does not even assume their presence. The "attitude of criticism" which it tries to awaken in its audience cannot be passionate enough for it.¹²⁵

Although it can be argued that only one of the terms on Brecht's list (anger) is actually an emotion, he suggested that certain emotions were appropriate to epic drama, whose presence was not taken for granted. Yet the "attitude of criticism" which he wanted to provoke in his audience through "passionate" means did not belong to the character portrayed but to the actor who presented it to the audience. Brecht wanted

¹²² Bertolt Brecht, "Appendices to the Short Organum", in *Brecht on Theatre*, pp.276-281 (pp.277-281)

¹²³ Bertolt Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting", in *Brecht on Theatre*, p.93

¹²⁴ See note 64 above

¹²⁵ Bertolt Brecht, "Formal Problems Arising from the Theatre's New Content", in *Brecht on Theatre*, p.227

his audience to empathize with the way the actor acted the role, as Mei Lanfang's self-observation or self-alienation, which Brecht thought of as being capable of stopping the spectator "from losing himself in the character completely, i.e. to the point of giving up his own identity" and to lend "a splendid remoteness to the events."¹²⁶

Brecht's contact with Chinese theatre served as the germ in the different stages of his evolving theory of empathy. As Timothy J. Wiles points out,

So Brecht's actor will evince hostility toward the audience whenever it attempts to empathize with the actor's assumption that the future is already known to him, at the same time that he encourages empathy with his means of knowing. The germ of this conclusion lies in Brecht's statement in [...] his essay on Chinese acting, that the audience identifies with the actor's act of self-observation, that it identifies with this most primary *Verfremdungseffekt*.¹²⁷

Though Brecht was to finalize his theory of empathy by trying to fuse acting and demonstration with experience and empathy, in practice he started to do so not long after his contact with Mei Lanfang's acting, with a result which is sometimes regarded as contradictory by some commentators who seem to ignore the fact that Brecht by no means intended to eliminate emotional identification with his characters.¹²⁸ As noted by Jan Needle and Peter Thomson,

¹²⁶ Bertolt Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting", in *Brecht on Theatre*, p.93

¹²⁷ Timothy J. Wiles, *The Theatre Event*, pp.82-83

¹²⁸ For example, Martin Esslin holds the view that although Brecht was wrong to banish the audience's empathy with his characters (because empathy is one of "the basic mechanism by which one human being communicates with another"), fortunately for Brecht, his audience went right on "being moved to pity and terror." To Esslin, Brecht's alienation effect lies in the conflict between this theoretical opposition to empathy and his audience's stubborn emotional involvement in his plays, or his success "lies in his partial failure to realize his own intention." See Martin Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1960), pp.141-142

Jan Needle and Peter Thomson think of Brecht as being "too exclusive" about specific emotional effects in that he either wanted to measure them or break them down, and that he refused to trust the audiences to draw the conclusions he wanted them to. They conclude that Brecht had little or no control "over his best writings which are pregnant with many possibilities." See Jan Needle and Peter Thomson, *Brecht* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), p.203

Galileo's recantation [...] brought several people at a private viewing to the point of bursting into tears---not merely of wanting to weep. The emotions induced, not surprisingly, were far from simple ones: complex forms of pity, for every character, oddly, not just for Galileo; and an awareness that a type of socially criminal act had been committed. Impossible, however, to be certain of the nature---or even the perpetrator---of the social crime, and impossible not to feel, as one tends to in *Mother Courage's* case, that the whole sad episode was a product of human weakness: it should not have happened, but it was inevitable.¹²⁹

Martin Esslin points it out even more clearly: "In Munich or Cologne, Paris or London, Brecht's own productions of his plays evoked anything but a wholly cerebral response. On the contrary: their success was due to their deep emotional impact on the audience."¹³⁰

Such seemingly contradictory effects, however, are reconcilable when we recognize that as a Marxist, Brecht believed in the antithetical conflicts between opposing social forces which bespoke the existence of history as a dialectical process. Clashes or "contradictions" are essential not only for desirable change but for existence itself. As John Willett points out, contradiction becomes "at once the motive force and the social aesthetic justification of his later work."¹³¹ Even if his evolving theory of empathy and corresponding theatre techniques to counteract it had little to do with Marxism, Brecht did not oppose the idea of contradiction per se. His concept of contradiction is consistent and self-explanatory in his theories and plays as texts. The idea of understanding a play through its performance underlies all the epic devices and the alienation effect which Brecht invented or appropriated by borrowing from other theatre traditions (notably Chinese acting). All of these call attention to the theatricality of performance as opposed to its naturalness, and break down the

¹²⁹ Jan Needle and Peter Thomson, *Brecht*, p.203

¹³⁰ Martin Esslin, *Brecht: A Choice of Evils*, p.210

¹³¹ John Willett, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht: A Study from Eight Aspects* (London: Methuen, 1959; 3rd rev. edn, 1967), p.193

empathetical effects which Brecht believed were customary with the illusionistic tradition of theatre. He was determined to create another kind of confirmation and acceptance of the audience's experience and empathy with the characters' emotions, through detachment and rational evaluation on both parts of the audience and the actor's acting of the role. To this end, he did not banish emotion (and empathy) from his stage but changed their function. Hence a reconciliation or a desirable showing of the contradiction between acting/demonstration and experience/empathy. What he needed, as he declared as early as 1926, was "a quick-witted audience that knows how to observe, and gets its enjoyment from setting its reason to work. [...]The sense of my plays is immanent. You have to fish it out for your self."¹³²

The second major aspect of the aesthetic-theatrical changes effected by Brecht's contact with Mei Lanfang's acting lies in his modification of a performance style. Although it is true that Brecht did not borrow any specific acting techniques or schematized gestural conventions from Chinese theatre, as he thought that "it is not entirely easy to realize that Chinese actor's A-effect is a transportable piece of technique: a conception that can be prised loose from the Chinese theatre,"¹³³ he emulated an example and followed or re-created a model which he discovered in Mei's stylized acting.

The stylization which for Brecht meant "alienating" in the art of the Chinese actor is intimately related to the fact that Chinese actors do not copy from life but interpret action and human emotions by a series of formal conventions. As has been mentioned earlier, Brecht showed enough insight into Mei Lanfang's acting by commenting on specific gestural conventions. He recognized the difference between Chinese and European theatre, although again he interpreted this difference in terms of his own notion of alienation effects. Anyway, Mei Lanfang's technique of showing outer signs of emotion through a combination of body movement and facial

¹³² Bertolt Brecht, "Conversation with Bert Brecht", in *Brecht on Theatre*, pp.14-17 (p.14)

¹³³ Bertolt Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting", in *Brecht on Theatre*, p.95

expression made him decide that he must develop similar ways to gestically externalize inner feelings.¹³⁴

Brecht's contact with Mei Lanfang's acting made him feel the need for his epic theatre to devise a method to present and externalize its message. In response, he created a performance style which does not only have a purpose in the skilful articulation of an externalizing, aesthetically satisfying language of convention, as that of Chinese theatre, but also constitutes the essence of Brecht's social aesthetic, or the social function of the theatre. Such a performance style is his elaboration of *Gestus*.

¹³⁴ Brecht marvelled at the way Mei changed his facial expressions: "At one moment the expression is of well-managed restraint; at another, of utter triumph. The artist has been using his countenance as a blank sheet, to be inscribed by the gest of the body. "Facial expressions exhibit the outer signs of inner emotions. To conjure up rage by raising one's voice and choking so that the blood shoots up to one's head, or to show a white face in terror by the mechanical means of burying one's face in one's hands with white make-up on them, were two simple examples cited by Brecht in comparison. However, such an exhibition of outer signs may accompany the emotions and identify them. Consequently, the alienation effect cannot intervene "in the form of emotions which need not correspond to those of the character portrayed," and on seeing worry the spectator may not feel, as expected by Brecht, a sensation of joy; on seeing anger, one of disgust. Mei's technique of showing outer signs of emotions, however, was a combination of body movement and facial expression. "He separates mime from gesture, [...] but without detracting from the latter, since the body's attitude is reflected in the face and is wholly responsible for its expression." The apparently composed character Mei displayed, according Brecht's observation, gave rise to an alienation effect. Upon seeing this, Brecht was led to believe that acting like this was "healthier" and more "creative."

The acting formulae of the traditional Chinese theatre are highly hypothetical, suppositional or symbolic. They are a kind of artistic language to describe the outer signs of natural movements or inner activities. Perhaps it is because of this that Chinese drama can best get across its messages to the audience in a direct visual fashion. Brecht asserts: "Everything to do with emotions has to be externalized, that is to say, it must be developed into a gesture." Such an idea is the same as that underpinning the conventions of Chinese theatre.

See Bertolt Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting", in *Brecht on Theatre*, p.92, p.94, p.95; "Short Description of a New Technique which Produces an Alienation Effect", in *Brecht on Theatre*, p.139; and also see Ma Wi, *Theatre Language (Xiju Yuyan)* (Shanghai: Literature and Arts Press, 1985), in which the theatre language of Chinese drama is categorized into eight major aspects of personification, action, lyricism, musicality, refinement, implication, imagistics and simplicity.

The term *Gestus* (its adjectival form, *gestisch*) first appeared in Brecht's writings in his notes to the opera *The Rise and Fall of the City Mahagonny* (performed in full form in 1930), published under the title "The Modern Theatre is the Epic theatre" in 1930, and then in a short, exclusive essay "On Gestic Music" which, unpublished until after his death, might have been written in 1932. John Willett defines *Gestus* as carrying the combined sense of "gist and gesture; an attitude or a single aspect of an attitude, expressible in words and actions." He chooses the obsolete English word "gest," meaning "bearing, carriage, mien" as the nearest manageable equivalent, along with its adjective "gestic."¹³⁵

Initially used to discuss the music in his operas, *Gestus* is related to the attention which Brecht paid to the basic social content of a scene or action. As he believed that the music in his epic theatre should communicate by taking up a position and giving the attitude,¹³⁶ he wanted to set up a criterion to judge the political value of the musical score by distinguishing gestic that were social gestic from those that were not. "Not all gestic are social gestic," says Brecht. "The social gestic is the gestic relevant to society, the gestic that allows conclusions to be drawn about the social circumstances."¹³⁷ He concluded that the success of the music in his epic theatre depended on "the different attitudes or gestic with which the performer ought to deliver the individual sections: politely or angrily, modestly or contemptuously, approvingly or argumentatively, craftily or without calculation."¹³⁸

The overtones of social function, which were partially set down by the social attitude or gestic which his musicians were required of in his early theories, are consistently carried out in Brecht's later writings and practice. The two most

¹³⁵ See the translator's note to Bertolt Brecht, "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre", in *Brecht on Theatre*, pp.33-42 (p.42)

¹³⁶ *ibid*, p.38

¹³⁷ Bertolt Brecht, "On Gestic Music", in *Brecht on Theatre*, pp.104-106 (pp.104-105)

¹³⁸ *ibid*, p.105

significant aspects of the further development are perhaps his extension of the idea to plot construction and acting techniques.

In keeping with the social gests of music, Brecht believed in the narrative drive of epic theatre by adopting a predominantly episodic structure, and the use of commentators or storytellers, and choruses. In this respect, the realm of gest is "the realm of attitudes adopted by the characters towards one another."¹³⁹ "Everything hangs on the 'story'" which is "what happens *between* people."¹⁴⁰ As will be discussed in the next chapter, Brecht's idea of "story" actually refers to the individual dramatic events, which are loosely connected to make the play a complete whole, a constructional technique reminiscent of that in Chinese drama.

Social gests are the nuclei of epic theatre's discontinuous, dialectical narrative, and accordingly the material that Brecht's actor would first isolate and work upon in performance. Brecht intended each incident portrayed in his theatre to have its basic gest, meaning "the clear and stylized expression of the social behaviour of human beings towards each other."¹⁴¹ The inner feelings of human beings had to be externalized through a *Gestus* that was "so simple and expressive that it could be quoted with the same ease as a well-turned line of dialogue is quoted."¹⁴²

"The Street Scene", an essay which Brecht wrote in 1938, shows how gestic technique consciously re-deploys everyday behaviour. In this example, a witness, who tries to show how an accident occurred and also how it might have been avoided, tells the story of the whole accident by re-enacting it for the bystanders, changing parts intermittently between the driver and the victim and shifting from the first to the third person. The bystanders are put in a position to corroborate or criticize the account, to learn from it, and to form their own judgement. An epic actor would treat the roles similarly, "acting them out" as observers or reporters, rather than getting entirely into

¹³⁹ Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre", in *Brecht on Theatre*, p.198

¹⁴⁰ *ibid*, p.200

¹⁴¹ Martin Esslin, *Brecht: A Choice of Evils*, p.124

¹⁴² Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre", in *Brecht on Theatre*, p.200

the role to invite empathy. The actor would play his character as a stranger, or as if from memory, demonstrating, therefore, the social gest implicit in an action or event in such a way as to "historicize" the whole story. Such a style of performance involves "quoting" words and actions, which Brecht summarizes in *The Messingkauf Dialogues* as: "To achieve the A-effect the actor must give up his *complete conversion* into the stage character. He *shows* the character, he *quotes* his lines, he *repeats* a real-life incident."¹⁴³

This is Brecht's final statement about his "alienating" or "gestic" performance style. Here we may see to what extent it is related to Chinese acting when we turn back to his observation of Mei Lanfang's performance. As Brecht noted, Mei expressed his awareness of being watched, observed himself, and would "occasionally look at the audience as if to say: isn't it just like that?" From time to time Mei also cast "an obvious glance at the floor, so as to judge the space available to him to his act." In this way Mei separated "mime from gesture, but without detracting from the latter," since the body's attitude was reflected in the face and was wholly responsible for its expression. Such an acting, Brecht concluded, "lent a splendid remoteness to the events."¹⁴⁴ Mei's acting, which employed stylized gestural conventions, revealed a clarity of line, a definition, a quality whose source was art rather than ordinary everyday life. This put him out of the character portrayed, in a position where he could "observe" and "quote," and also invite the spectator to "observe" and judge, the character he "repeated" on stage. The "gest" which the elegance, rhythm and tempo of his acting conveyed to the understanding of the audience was an age-old theatricalism wherein realism or illusionistic empathy was of secondary importance. Only a socially conscious Brecht, upon seeing his performance, would "transport" it as a prototype, however untransportable, from which to proceed with an idea of *Gestus*.

¹⁴³ Bertolt Brecht, *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, p.104

¹⁴⁴ Bertolt Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting", in *Brecht on Theatre*, p.92, p.93

Of many examples of Brecht's *gestisch* performance style, or the "stylized externalization of inner emotions,"¹⁴⁵ the finest one is perhaps Helene Weigel's well-known treatment of the main character's representation of one of her most powerfully emotional moments in Brecht's 1951 production of *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1940):

As she hears the salvo that signals the execution of her son Swiss Cheese, [...] she clenches her rough skirt, leaning forward with a straight, tense back as if shot in the stomach. At the same time, she thrusts her head straight back against her shoulders; her mouth tears open until it seems that her jaw will break, but no sound comes forth. For a moment, her whole physicality has the impossible, angular contortion of one of Picasso's screaming horses in *Guernica*. Then she snaps her mouth shut, brings her torso and head back into alignment, and collapses the tension in her torso, slumping in on herself.¹⁴⁶

Weigel's silent scream, unusual in its degree of technical accomplishment, illustrates the way in which Brecht combined the actor's gestural elaboration of role with the careful elaboration of inner emotions. The characters' reactions to the scream provide

¹⁴⁵ John Rouse cites the acting of Hans Gaugler as Läufer in *The Private Tutor* (1950) as a fine example of Brecht's "quotable" gestural leitmotif. The "bow" which the actor developed for his character to the Major and Privy Councillor was a highly stylized, highly exaggerated, very funny bit of acting technique, far more elaborate than the "natural" ones by going lower to the ground, even to the feet of the Major. The bow, which was repeated four times, each more aggressively fawning than the last, interrupted the discussion on economic matters between the Major and Privy Councillor, who repeatedly ignored Läufer, became an object of analysis to the audience. See John Rouse, "Brecht and the Contradictory Actor", *Theatre Journal*, 36 (1984), 25-41 (pp.32-34)

Robert Leach analyzes Brecht's gestural performance style in terms of the "interruption of action" which Walter Benjamin concludes as one of the principal concerns of Brecht's epic theatre. He chooses *Mother Courage and Her Children* as a textual example wherein he finds that "the technique of interrupting is active and interventionist" and "strenuously applied." Mother Courage's songs, the contrast between her sitting and waiting and the Young Soldier marching up and down, shouting, the "war-like gesture" of Eilif and the Commander, and the drumming Kattrin and the frantical soldiers, etc., are all regarded as gestures which are "pregnant with meaning." See Robert Leach, "*Mother Courage and Her Children*", in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, pp.128-138 (pp.131-134)

¹⁴⁶ Quoted from John Rouse, "Brecht and the Contradictory Actor", *Theatre Journal*, 36 (1984), p.34

Brecht's audiences insight into the social contradictions affecting even the most seemingly personal, emotional behaviour, copied from life and yet sublimated, as Mei Lanfang did, to stimulate the audiences into at least reflecting on the problems which they often express through gestures. Thus, the stylization and exaggeration of gesture, and tempo which Brecht used to present this silent scream of the protagonist in this particular play exemplifies his different emotional emphasis on what would normally be a powerfully empathetical scene of bereavement. The alienation effect created by the different balance maintained between the actor's playing of the role and demonstrating it, namely, a suppression of feelings on the actor's part when an 'outburst is normally expected, vouchsafes multi-dimensional social meanings which the audience may reflect upon---the cruelty of war, the blind foolishness of businessmen profiting from it, or the strong individual will to survive it.

To sum up, Brecht arrived on the scene when modern German theatre was exploding with new forms and styles with the compelling demands of a changing epoch in the wake of the First World War. Reacting first against the Expressionist theatre, Brecht was influenced by Piscator's political theatre and was attracted to the avant-garde movement in Russia as well. Yet he was searching for a theatre of his own, and was in need of "a technique for quite definite social purposes," that is, the alienation effect. Leaving aside his own instinctive experiments, among various sources from which Brecht is said to have derived the concept of the alienation effect, his direct contact with the acting style of Mei Lanfang is perhaps of the greatest significance. This is not because the suggestions of Brecht's indebtedness to sources of influences, such as Marxism or the Russian formalists, are inadequate, but because ample evidence can be found in Brecht's writings which suggests that the traditional Chinese theatre did play an important part in the aesthetic-theatrical and even socio-cultural innovations of his epic drama. Brecht's idiosyncratic interpretation of Chinese techniques became a cornerstone of his theory of epic theatre. His observation of and subsequent comment on Mei Lanfang's demonstration of the acting techniques of

Chinese theatre not only marked an important stage of his evolving dramaturgy, prompting him to theorize his previous theoretically subconscious practice of theatre, but also contributed to the development of his notion of empathy and the establishment of a gestic performance style. Mei Lanfang's self-observation and self-alienation helped him realize the value of "empathizing the acting of the role" and an "attitude of criticism," which further modified his idea of how to reconcile the contradictions between acting/demonstration and experience/empathy. And furthermore, he was led to transport conventionalized Chinese acting techniques into *Gestus*, a performance style which enabled him to externalize inner feelings to human beings towards each other through stylized gestures, yet on a more socially conscious level than the aesthetically edifying Chinese theatre.

Chapter II The Non-Aristotelian Drama: A Comparison between the Episodic Structure of Brecht's Epic Drama and that of Traditional Chinese Drama

It has been suggested earlier that Brecht responded to Mei Lanfang's acting, which he interpreted as stylized externalization of inner feelings, in such a way that he transported it into his own *gestisch* performance style. Being largely concerned with the social function of the theatre, Brecht's *Gestus* is not only related to the "quotable" gestures of the actor in acting out the role, but also to the narrative drive of epic drama which is characterized by a predominantly non-Aristotelian episodic structure. Thus, as an acting technique, the alienation effect applies to almost all the major areas of theatrical experience: in the actor's effort to play at being and to stand outside the character portrayed; in the social attitude shown in the language, the conflict of dialogue and the contradictions between the speech and actions of the characters and the audience's response; in the handling of music and décor, and, more importantly here, in the play's structure, the disposition and contrasting of scenes and episodes. The alienation effect in Brecht's theatre is not confined to formal techniques, a vehicle for the author's message. It is simultaneously the content itself, the matter the author is structuring and his perspective on it. The social content that operates in the same way as the alienation effect is the *Gestus*, which also denotes the essential theme of an incident, a scene, and a whole play. In Brecht's episodically constructed plays, the social gests arise from the interaction of people, their attitudes and behaviour towards each other. The predictably unpredictable behaviour of the drunk-sober Mister Puntila, the hideous picture of a war constantly expanding to crush Mother Courage who is, nevertheless, intent on benefiting from it, and the cumulative scenes of the Nazi terror of the Third Reich, internal and external, at once distanced and frighteningly immediate, etc., are examples of alienations that denote the social *Gestus* exposing the contradictions in society. Thus, the integration of

content with the formal means of presenting it is the distinguishing feature of the alienation technique in Brecht's works.

The way Brecht's concept of the alienation effect effected an aesthetic-theatrical change in his evolving performance style and further effected the formal constructional features of his epic drama seems to suggest a clear progressive pattern of Chinese influence under which Brecht set to work in his epic theatre. The whole issue, however, is not as simple as this, for Brecht's adoption of a non-Aristotelian episodic structure for his theatre, namely, the seemingly loosely connected scenes, recalls that of classical Chinese drama and at the same time is to be seen as a conscious choice. Brecht's epic form was determined by his anti-Aristotelian stance and reaction against the dramatic theatre of well-made drama. On the other hand, it was also related to the agit-prop or political theatre in the post-war Germany which was characterized with its simplicity of structure and expression, a return to the German tradition of theatre as moral institution.¹ Thus, when he was brought into contact with Chinese theatre whose "epic, story-telling kind of acting" had so strong an appeal to him, he was able to respond to its non-Aristotelian features, an aesthetic which they perhaps both shared, as a model for his analogous method of structuring theatrical events dealing with different individuals as representatives of entire social strata. From this perspective, we shall first take a look at the author's relations with the Aristotelian norms or tradition, as well as the practice of the agit-prop theatre, before the analogies between his epic form and the classical Chinese dramatic structure can be understood.

¹ The classical expression in the mainstream of the two-century-old German dramatic tradition is found in Schiller's 1785 essay "The Theatre Considered as a Moral Institution": "The theatre is the establishment where entertainment is united with instruction, rest with exertion, pastime with education." Quoted from Cecil Davies, "The German Theatre as an Artistic and Social Institution: From the March Revolution to the Weimar Republic", in *Brecht in Perspective*, pp.108-127 (p.108)

When Martin Esslin points out that we must not "overlook the large extent to which the Brechtian theatre represents a return to the mainstream of European classical tradition,"² he seems to be echoing Richard Southern's characterization of Western theatre as developing through five anti-illusionistic phases followed by an illusionistic one, and then with a major return to the anti-illusionistic tradition again.³ What he tries to remind us of at the same time is the fundamental similarities that have always existed among the great theatres of the past, whether Asian or European. That we might read a return to the classical tradition for Chinese borrowing suggests that, by voyaging through Chinese drama, Western dramatists, Brecht in particular, may have found a way back to their sources and to the strength and nutriment that implies. In the traditional Chinese theatre there is always a *living tradition* actually embodied in performance. To use Chinese theatricalism need not result in slavish imitation, quaintness, or superficiality. Brecht is an example of what can be done when a strong, vigorous, independent mind comes into contact with what is apparently a foreign tradition. He made it his own by adapting Chinese devices to his own purpose, or by arriving at similar devices through his own search and meditation.

Martin Esslin's conviction that Brecht's theatre is a return to the mainstream of the European classical theatre tradition, however, only applies to the fact that Brecht's anti-illusionistic theatre aimed at the breakdown of the fourth wall. When it comes to Brecht's anti-Aristotelian stance, the fact that he used the term Aristotelian theatre as well as dramatic theatre to categorize the tradition against which his epic theatre was set, Martin Esslin's remark seems to be less convincing.

Brecht's epic theatre can be understood in part as a reaction against the classical drama of Goethe and Schiller, and as an affirmation of the tradition represented by such dramatists as Lenz, Büchner, Grabbe, and Wedekind. Even if there is no space here to go into details about these dramatists' theories and practice, what can be briefly said about them is that they exploited the possibilities of an open

² Martin Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work*, p.139

³ Richard Southern, *The Seven Ages of the Theatre* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), pp.13-14

form in the conviction that such a form was necessary to do justice to the subject matter which, for them, constituted reality, and which was excluded by the classical theories of Goethe and Schiller. In contrast to the classical style in strict accordance with Aristotelian norms, an ideal world firmly enclosed by a surrounding wall, the anti-Aristotelian dramatists who anticipated Brecht posited a world with open windows, thorough which external reality could penetrate; and like Brecht, they tended to choose their characters from among those individuals in whom the sense of exposure to the forces from the world outside was at its greatest: unheroic, average mortals, with an inadequate understanding of their predicament.⁴ To various degrees, they all exploited a dramatic structure of a multitude of self-contained episodes united not by causal continuity but by subtle correspondences and contrasts in the themes, characters, incidents and above all in the colloquial prose dialogue which thus acquires the richness of poetry.⁵

As episodic development of drama allowed Brecht's predecessors the freedom to go where they wanted to sketch a valid picture of social strata, to illustrate the repetitious nature of experience, and to pinpoint whatever social and historical forces which control the action of the play and, by implication, human action in general, the young bard of Augsburg found them to be positive examples when he launched his dramatic career amidst the profound influence of Expressionism. His first play, the twenty-two-scene *Baal*, which was mentioned in Chapter I as a parody of Expressionist drama, was clearly modelled on *Woyzeck* (left unfinished in 1837, published in 1879) by Büchner who is commonly regarded as an important forerunner of Expressionism. Later in his life when after his exile he returned to Germany, thus back into the relevant cultural and political context, he explored again the Lenz-

⁴ See John Osborne, "Anti-Aristotelian Drama from Lenz to Wedekind", in *The German Theatre: A Symposium*, ed. by Ronald Hayman (London: Oswald Wolff, 1975), pp.87-105 (pp.87-89, p.104)

⁵ Ladislaus Lob, "German Drama before Brecht: From Neo-Classicism to Expressionism", in *Brecht in Perspective*, pp.20-21

Büchner tradition with *The Days of the Commune* which bears evident recollections of Büchner's *Danton's Death* (1835), and *The Tutor* (1950), an adaptation of the work by Lenz.

Although Brecht himself acknowledges his indebtedness to his German predecessors by saying: "The line that seems to lead to certain attempts of the epic theatre runs from the Elizabethan drama via Lenz, early Schiller, Goethe, [...] Grabbe, Büchner. It is a very strong line, easily followed,"⁶ it is dangerous to assume an organic evolution in the history of any artistic genre, for the development of epic theatre was no simple linear process. Brecht may have found a loose way of constructing drama in Lenz, Büchner and so on, if what he meant by "certain attempts of the epic theatre" refers only to a sequence of incidents or events, narrated without artificial restrictions as to time, place or relevance to a formal plot. Epic theatre, as discussed in the previous chapter, was invented mainly by Piscator in his productions which attempted to conceptualize whatever action lay at the heart of the piece to involve the audience's active participation, with the help of an array of theatrical techniques including machinery and film projections. Brecht's contribution to it, apart from his playwriting for which he is credited with the honour of being an inventor of epic theatre, was his development of alienation effects, gestic acting and other refinements which gives the term another meaning, with wider currency.⁷ As a playwright Brecht was of course primarily concerned with the form of the play. But he was equally concerned with the form of the theatre where his plays were produced. Thus, his theory of the alienation effect and *gestus* is written right into the structure of the play that dialectically treats individuals as having two conflicting sides, capable of changing their own fate and environment. This differentiates Brecht from Lenz, Büchner, Grabbe or Wedekind who either present human beings as impotent victims at the receiving end of someone else's aggression in a world that is simply beyond help (in the case of Lenz), or exhibit humanity as a passive object of irresistible

⁶ Quoted from John Willett, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht*, p.105

⁷ Hugh Rorrison, "Brecht and Piscator", in *Brecht in Perspective*, pp.145-159 (p.154)

compulsions in an incomprehensibly hostile universe (in the case of Büchner), or display their own troubled psyche through violent incidents and overdrawn heroes (in the case of Grabbe), or extol Nietzsche's vitalist instinct and share the Naturalist's predilection for the seamy side of life (in the case of Wedekind).

Like Piscator who, in order to show the "scientific penetration of the material" in a Marxist sense, tried to represent the political as well as economic chaos in the post-war German by staging a succession of stations, episodes, extracts, sketches, and tableaux out of history, Brecht also saw the need to "cut his plays up into a series of little independent playlets, so that the action progresses by jumps. [...] He does it in such a way that each individual scene can be given a title of a historical or social-political or anthropological kind."⁸ Here we can see that his epic methods not only made full use of the technique of montage developed by Eisenstein in film, or, reportage or scene montage in the political theatre represented by Piscator at the time, but also applied picaresque principles for which he might have also sought inspiration from Döblin. Like Piscator who referred to Döblin, as well as Joyce and Dos Passos, as models for the form of epic theatre, Brecht also found that the novelist's episodic style presented a clear image of the emphasis of epic drama:

The epic writer Döblin provided an excellent criterion when he said that with an epic work, as opposed to a dramatic, one can as it were take a pair of scissors and cut it into individual pieces, which remain fully capable of life.⁹

It can be said that Brecht began in every genre in traditions old or new, transcending them only when they hindered him. Although he was never unequivocally related to the agit-prop or political theatre movement in the post-war Germany, through his own experiment and his personal relationship with Piscator and Friedrich Wolf, he was brought to realize that its episodic structure, the short scene

⁸ Bertolt Brecht, *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, p.75

⁹ Bertolt Brecht, "Theatre for Pleasure or Theater for Instruction", in *Brecht on Theatre*, pp.69-77 (p.70)

and scene montage, apart from other essential formal components such as narration, report, the simultaneous scenes and so on, had several advantages. It depicted a group of different characters representing the whole social strata who could show the objective reason for the support given by certain sections of German society to political movement on the basis of the entire class struggle; it presented the group of individuals as related to each other in the world of ideas as a result of particular social and political conditions; and more importantly, without the portrayal of a central hero that might have had the audience empathetically involved in an artificial stretching of the character, the spectator could learn about the different struggles of different characters, shown in the multiplicity of episodes, as something he had not directly experienced. In a conversation with Wolf, Brecht pointed out that having to show "an inner change" in a character, or "a development to the final point of recognition ... would often be unrealistic, and in my view a materialist presentation necessitates that the consciousness of the characters is determined by their social being and not dramaturgically manipulated."¹⁰

However, unlike Piscator or Wolf who subordinated artistic intentions to revolutionary objectives, Brecht laid great stress on the poetic aspects or the literary values of his epic drama. He was not only seeking a similar style of simplicity of structure and expression, he would build it upon a solid theoretical foundation. This was perhaps why he should launch an assault on the stronghold of the well-made drama of Aristotelian theatre.

The offence to the Aristotelian norms which Brecht took was both conscious and consistent. Among many phenomena of aesthetic experience, identification was one that caused Brecht concern. As both a political and aesthetic choice, he took Aristotelian catharsis as the creation of disinterested interest. However, he discarded the idea that catharsis could free the spectator, so that in identifying with the hero, his emotion could be heightened, and through identification could influence him to

¹⁰ Quoted from Richard Stourac and Kathleen McCreery, *Theatre as a Weapon*, p.165

perceive what was exemplary in human action. For Brecht this was not sufficient. He believed in the idea of a non-Aristotelian theatre which could "counter the alienation of social life through a second alienation,"¹¹ i.e. through the alienation effect: the attitude of the actor vis-à-vis his role, the anti-illusionistic staging, and the flooding of the stage and the auditorium with light. The function of these techniques of alienation was to convey events "in their remarkableness and strangeness" so that the spectator would see society presented in such a way "that it becomes subject to control."¹²

According to Aristotle, one of the most important purposes of the theatre was "the pleasure derived from pity and fear by means of imitation that the poet should seek to produce."¹³ Catharsis resulted in the pity and fear which were aroused in the spectator who was either "purified," i.e. reduced to beneficent order and proportion, or "purged," i.e. expelled from his emotional system, by the play. In Sophocles' *Oedipus*, for example, the tragic catharsis lies in the fact that the hero did not know that the old man he killed at the crossroads was his father. Neither did he know that the woman he had married was his mother. There follows the process of proving these, by the remorse of the hero, which shows that if he had known the facts he would not have done the deed. The "purification" of the tragic deed, i.e. Oedipus's self-blinding, makes the hero eligible for the spectator's pity as well as fear or horror and renders pleasure of catharsis on the latter's part.

Such pleasure as was received by the spectator from watching the play was supposed to be educational by nature. In Brecht's words, it was "the spiritual cleansing of the spectator."¹⁴ In simple terms, the process of this "spiritual cleansing" was the one through which the performance of a play educated or purified the spectator by arousing in him the feeling of horror and pity. He was horrified by the hero's

¹¹ Hans Roberts Jauss, *Towards Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, ed. & trans. by Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p.105

¹² *ibid*

¹³ Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. by Gerald F. Else (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1967), p.40

¹⁴ Bertolt Brecht, "On the Use of Music in an Epic Theatre", in *Brecht on Theatre*, pp.84-90 (p.87)

innermost tragic flaws which brought forth the latter's tragic end, a good lesson for the spectator to learn in order to avoid the same fate; and he felt pity about the hero on account of overwhelming external tragic odds in combination with his tragical nature.

Brecht points out:

The catharsis of which Aristotle writes---cleansing by fear and pity, or from fear and pity---is a purification which is performed not only in a pleasurable way, but precisely for the purpose of pleasure. To ask or to accept more of the theatre is to set one's own mark too low.¹⁵

In trying to come to grips with catharsis, Brecht was touching on one of the most sensitive spots in dramatic history and theory. He was setting the stage for an assault on the very stronghold of the aesthetics of drama. He wanted to prove that the traditional practices and interpretations of such a concept were only products and reflections of a particular historic period. They were not absolutes, but variables.

According to Brecht's design, the non-Aristotelian theatre was anti-metaphysical, materialistic. It required its audience to assume a critical attitude towards the inhumane capitalist system under which there was a great deal of "bloody confusion" and "ordained disorder."¹⁶ They must be educated to think how to interfere with social reality and reform the present world. The duty of the theatre was to refrain

¹⁵ Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre", in *Brecht on Theatre*, p.181

¹⁶ What Brecht's non-Aristotelian theatre aimed at can be seen in the opening remarks made by the players at the beginning of *The Exception and the Rule* which he wrote in 1930 (not staged until 1947 in Paris):

We are about to tell you
The story of a journey. An exploiter
And two of the exploited are the travellers.
Examine carefully the behaviour of the people:
Find it surprising though not unusual
Inexplicable though normal
Incomprehensible though it is the rule.
Consider even the most insignificant, seemingly simple
Action with distrust. Ask yourselves whether it is
 necessary
Especially if it is usual.
We ask you expressly to discover

from handing its hero over to the world as if it were his inescapable fate, so it would not dream of handing the spectator over to an inspiring theatrical experience. Anxious to teach the spectator a quite definite practical attitude, directed towards changing the world, it must begin by making him adopt in the theatre a quite different attitude from what he is used to.¹⁷

Brecht's repudiation of the Aristotelian concept of catharsis went hand in hand with his repudiation of the dramatic form and structure governed by Aristotelian norms. To Brecht, Aristotelian theatre was the theatre that tried to achieve its purpose of "spiritual cleansing" by moving its audience's feelings through action. In doing so, it must acquire actions throughout its dramatic structure which were deeply touching. The plot must be centred around the hero's tragic story, focusing on a particular tragic event. In other words, it must be dramatic in its whole structure. As a desirable result of the performance of such kind of drama, during which the actors were required to try hard to experience and express the feelings of the figures imitated, empathy arose, and hence catharsis. As contrary to this, Brecht advocated the replacement of the dramatic with the epic with regard to the structure of drama, the replacement of passive empathy throughout the performance of a play. This is perhaps the reason why in all his works he always tried to avoid calling himself a dramatist (*dramatisker*), but merely a playwright (*stückschreiber*). According to Brecht, a dramatist wrote about dramatic theatre. What he wrote was epic theatre.

In the notes to *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1927-9), Brecht clearly expressed his conviction that a modern theatre was an epic theatre. It was

That what happens all the time is not natural.
For to say that something is natural
In such times of bloody confusion
Of ordained disorder, of systematic arbitrariness
Of inhuman humanity is to
Regard it as unchangeable.

Bertolt Brecht, *Collected Plays*, ed. & trans. by John Willett and Ralph Manheim, 19 vols (London: Methuen, 1970-), 4iii (1983), p.165

¹⁷ Bertolt Brecht, "Indirect Impact of the Epic Theatre", in *Brecht on Theatre*, p.57

different from the traditional Aristotelian dramatic theatre in many ways. Brecht's enumeration of the changes of emphasis between the two is as follows:

DRAMATIC THEATRE

plot
implicates the spectator
in a stage situation
wears down his capacity
for action
provides him with sensations
experience
the spectator is involved
into something
suggestion
instinctive feelings are
preserved
the spectator is in the thick
of it, shares the experience
the human being is taken for
granted
he is unalterable
eyes on the finish
one scene makes another
growth
linear development
evolutionary determinism
man as a fixed point
thought determines being
feeling

EPIC THEATRE

narrative
turns the spectator
into an observer, but
arouses his capacity
for action
forces him to take decisions
picture of the world
he is made to face something

argument
brought to the point of
recognition
the spectator stands outside,
studies
the human being is the object of
the inquiry
he is alterable and able to alter
eyes on the course
each scene for itself
montage
in curves
jumps
man as a process
social being determines thought
reason¹⁸

In order to avoid the impression that he denied the dramatic structure for the sake of his postulation of epic theatre, Brecht made a note hereby when he was revising his works in the later stages of his life. He points out: "The table does not show absolute antitheses but mere shifts of accent. In a communication of fact, for instance, we may choose whether to stress the element of emotional suggestion or that of plain rational argument."¹⁹

¹⁸ Bertolt Brecht, "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre", in *Brecht on Theatre*, p.37

¹⁹ *ibid*, p.37

As Arrigo Subiotto notes, by emphasizing such "shifts of accent," Brecht was trying to prevent his tabulation from being taken to be the assertion of a new dramatic dogma. But even though he was cautious about promulgating a total rejection of dramatic theatre, his note still suggests his epic theatre's tendency towards an open form as different from the closed structure of traditional theatre.²⁰

In Brecht's comparison of the different points of emphasis between traditional or dramatic theatre and his epic theatre, there are four main points which constitute the guideline of his theory, and serve as a key to an understanding of his performance system.

Firstly, dramatic theatre emphasizes action which presents a dramatic process on stage, while such a process in epic theatre is carried out by narration. The actor, as a cool-minded storyteller, narrates and comments upon that which the character portrayed has experienced.

Secondly, dramatic theatre involves its audience with the dramatic events presented on stage so that they feel as the characters feel, cry or laugh together with them. Contrarily, epic theatre endeavours to keep its audience as on-lookers, to encourage them to think, to make independent judgements about those events.

Thirdly, dramatic theatre exercises emotional power to create theatrical illusions. The elaborate human emotions it presents are meant to attract its audience, to arouse their feelings in order to incite pleasure in watching the play. Epic theatre, on the other hand, emphasizes argument or criticism. What it presents is the reason why the audience should be emotionally touched, and what it seeks is its audience's obtaining a rational understanding of the events described, hence their education.

Fourthly, what dramatic theatre presents is human existence being determined by thought. Epic theatre, on the contrary, presents a human existence which determines thought. There is nothing unalterable in the world. Everything can be changed.

²⁰ Arrigo Subiotto, "Epic Theatre: A Theatre for the Scientific Age", in *Brecht in Perspective*, p.32

In short, what Brecht postulates in his compilation of the list of contrasts between dramatic and epic drama is that dramatic theatre involves the audience's emotions in the experience of the characters and thereby fosters a passive acceptance of the existing order, while epic theatre distances the audience from the play and thereby promotes critical thinking and the will to change society. From these ideological differentiations follows a new law of form. While dramatic theatre moves in a causally coherent structure, the "inevitability of development," epic theatre progresses in structural inconsistencies, in "leaps;" the former sets up "one scene for the other," the latter one scene against the other, "each scene for itself" and a "montage" of such scenes.

Thus, we can see that Brecht created a form to break down the "evolutionary" inevitability of classical drama,²¹ allowing each scene or episode to stand independently as evidence of a process taking place. The autonomy of the separate parts of a play enables the author to select and assemble materials for an explanatory presentation of people's behaviour. Instead of embodying or simulating a situation, Brecht's epic theatre narrates, with all the detachment that is implied, so that the spectator can use his critical faculties in assessing what is being enacted.

One of Brecht's most representative plays is perhaps *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*,²² written between 1935 and 1938 when Hitler's power was at its peak in

²¹ By the time Brecht came to revise his table of contrasts, he no longer needed to define his epic theatre against the Aristotelian model. After five years of exile, he became more concerned with how to define epic theatre's function and purpose in a political context than its earlier dealings with social and public matters. See *ibid*, pp.33-34

²² Jan Needle and Peter Thomson note that some commentators regard this play as being "Aristotelian" or "un-Brechtian" with "metaphorical sighs of relief that can almost be heard rising from the page." Brecht himself refuted this view with his proposed stage version (put together in America in 1942 and translated by Eric Bentley in 1943 under the title *The Private Life of the Master Race*), wherein Brecht used the four-time appearance of a German tank, together with military music, as the tenor and vehicle throughout the whole play. In between each individual scene the roar of the tank was also heard. Jan

domestically expanding its organization, crushing opposition, suppressing the working class, and building military strength. Brecht based his material upon newspapers and witnesses' reports and tried to expose the fear and spiritual depression of ordinary people and their miseries in daily life as caused by fascism.

One of the most distinctive formal features of *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* is that each of its twenty-seven scenes can be viewed as a playlet, or a play within a play. These playlets combine to provide not only a framework, but a key to Brecht's understanding of how Hitler's terror worked and how the audiences should reflect upon it. In the playlet "Judicial process" (scene 6), for example, Brecht treats the predicament of a judge less with compassion than an almost surreal humour. Storm Troopers have robbed a Jewish jewellery shop and the case is brought to the court. When pressed by the Judge for background information, the Detective Inspector becomes worried about his family life which is likely to be threatened if there is a fair legal settlement of the case. The Prosecutor does not expect any justice to be done at all. Although the Judge wants to exercise justice, he is quite at a loss what to do. Realising the impossibility of the case, the Senior Judge, who is invited over by the Judge, decides to leave it entirely to the latter and warns that he should be extremely cautious. When the court is going to proceed and the defendants are stepping in, the Prosecutor wants to be on the bench. The Judge has to preside from the dock, panicky and sweating. His attendant "laughs absurdly."

It is a horrible, and horribly funny story which Brecht presents with a cool narrative objectivity. He does not probe deeply into the inner side of the characters, and is able to maintain a distance between the actors as narrators and the figures portrayed, and let the audiences use their critical faculties to judge them.

Against the background of Aristotelian dramatic theory, Brecht's epic theatre bears a lot of resemblance to the practices of the traditional Chinese theatre. The

Needle and Peter Thomson think of this as an "exact compression" of what Brecht achieved as a whole. See Jan Needle and Peter Thomson, *Brecht*, p.104

episodic structure of his dramas, in particular, is more reminiscent of Chinese drama than any other Western theatre traditions. Martin Esslin agrees with this when he says:

The construction of the plays of the "epic" theatre, which rejects the logically built, "well-made" play, is free from the need of creating suspense, loosely knit, and episodic; instead of mounting to a dynamic climax, the story unfolds in a number of separate situations, each rounded and complete in itself. The total effect of the play will be built up through the juxtaposition and "montage" of contrasting episodes. While the "Aristotelian" drama can only be understood as a whole, the "epic" drama can be cut into slices which will continue to make sense and give pleasure, like the favourite chapters of a novel which can be read by themselves, or the extracts from plays of great length that are performed as self-contained units in the Chinese classical theatre.²³

Drama is a constructional art. The length of a playtext, the number of characters, the contents of the story, and the changing of scenes, etc., are all limited by stage conditions. Accordingly, the structure of events becomes particularly important in dramatic literature. Among the six elements essential for tragedy, Aristotle thought the greatest to be "the structuring of the incidents, [...] the structure of events, the plot, is the goal of tragedy, and the goal is the greatest thing of all."²⁴

The construction of traditional Western drama was based upon the concept of the three unities. Even if Aristotle himself did not make a clear definition about this, his theory of dramatic imitation provided theoretical foundations for later generations. Aristotle asserts in his *Poetics*: "Tragedy is an imitation of an action which is complete and whole and has some magnitude." Due to objective limitations of time and space on stage, what is imitated should be "in a fixed order" and "possess a definite size" in order to "be perceived at once," "because in the case of tragedy it is not possible to represent many different parts of the action as of the time they are performed but only the part on the stage, involving the actors." Things too tiny or too

²³ Martin Esslin, *Brecht: A Choice of Evils*, p.118

²⁴ Aristotle, *Poetics*, p.27

huge cannot be perceived at once on stage and therefore cannot turn out to be beautiful.²⁵

It follows from the above that Aristotle actually defined the length of drama (of his age, of course), namely, a play should be as long as the time it takes for the imitation. The hours taken in acting out an event in the original place should be spent in its dramatization on stage. The length of a play should be one complete conflict which comprises exposition, development, climax and conclusion.

Describing dramatic unity, William Archer enumerates three major sorts: the unity of a plum-pudding, the unity of a string or chain, and the unity of the Parthenon. The unity of a plum-pudding, exemplified by his analysis of Bernard Shaw's *Getting Married*, is "the unity of a number of ingredients stirred up together, put in a cloth, boiled to a certain consistency, and then served up in a blue flame of lambent humour." Shaw's play has the unity of a good plum-pudding where "the due proportions of the ingredients are carefully studied" with "a number of people in one room, talking continuously and without a single pause, on different aspects of a given theme." Although Archer agrees that "the play had all the globular unity of a pill," he thinks of such a "pill" as too big to be swallowed at one gulp, criticizing it as "a mere concession to human weakness" in preferring the plum-pudding to be "served up in three chunks instead of one."²⁶

As opposed to "the inorganic continuity" of Shaw's *Getting Married*, Sophocles' *Oedipus* has the unity "of carefully calculated proportion, order, interrelation of parts." To Archer, this is the best form of unity of a play, as it consists of five acts and an epilogue with the chorus employed to emphasize the successive stages of the action, and to mark the rhythm of its progress. It is "the unity of a fine piece of architecture, or even of a living organism."²⁷

²⁵ *ibid*, p.30

²⁶ William Archer, *Play-Making* (New York: Dover, 1960), p.86

²⁷ *ibid*, p.87

The unity of a string or chain, as Archer believes, does not concern Western dramatists, because "it is not of either Shaw or Sophocles," but "of most novels and some plays" which "present a series of events, more or less closely intertwined or interlinked with one another, but not built up into any symmetrical interdependence."²⁸

John Howard Lawson voices the same opinion with Archer's exclusion of string or chain unity in Western drama. He points out that, when writing plays, the dramatist should seek a specific system of causes related to a defined event.

He is not looking for a chain of cause and effect, but for causes, however diverse, leading to *one effect*. This system of causes is designed to show that the end and scope of the action is inevitable, that it is the rational outcome of a conflict between individuals and their environment.²⁹

Just like Aristotle and his followers who assign highest priority to the unity of dramatic events, Chinese theoreticians also stress the importance of constructing the plot of drama. Li Yu of the late Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and early Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) clearly points out that "plot always comes first."³⁰ A contemporary dramatist of his time, Qi Biaoja, also notes that "to all playwrights structuring of events is the most difficult thing, and speeches and songs are the second."³¹ Yet unlike the simple or complex structure as outlined by Aristotle, Chinese drama

²⁸ *ibid*, p.86

²⁹ John Howard Lawson, *Theory and Techniques of Playwriting* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), p.191

³⁰ Li Yu, "Leisurely Reflections upon Drama" ("Xianqing Ouji"), in *Collected Essays of Ancient Chinese Dramatic Theory*, (*Zhongguo Gudai Xiju Lilun Ji*), [n. ed.] (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou Shuhuashe, 1982), pp.62-80 (p.63). The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Wanshi buju wei shou."

³¹ Qi Biaoja, "Understanding Drama" ("Yuanshantang Qupin"), in *Collected Essays of Ancient Chinese Dramatic Theory*, pp.287-291 (p.290). The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Zuo nanzhuanqi zhe, geju wei nan, qubai cizhi."

follows its own pattern, which is more or less "the unity of a string or chain" or "a chain of cause and effect."

In defining this particular structure of drama, however, the Chinese have their own terminologies. Jiao Juyin, one of the outstanding contemporary Chinese theatre practitioners, calls it "the unity of a chain of nine rings," or "the unity of interlinked rings."³² Ma Ye names it as "the unity of a necklace."³³ Other critics use terms like "the unity of a string of pearls" or "the unity of a thread of interlinked knots."³⁴ More than three centuries before, Li Yu had already pointed out that "play-making is just like stitching up clothes." The stitch holes where the needle pokes through stand for the individual scenes in a play, while the thread in between connecting them serves as the plot line or structural development. Good tailoring needs proportionate stitches to sew up well-cut pieces of cloth, and proper arrangement of parts or sections makes a good play. Accordingly, Li Yu defines the structure of dramatic events in Chinese theatre as "the unity of intensive stitches."³⁵

Different as they are, the above definitions all serve to point out the significance of the unity of Chinese dramatic structure which consists of the chronological development of various stories and events strung up side by side with each other in a gradual progress which are rounded and complete inside their individual selves. Unlike the Western tradition which breaks up the story into several major units, i.e. acts or scenes, wherein are concentrated intertwined events and

³² Jiao Juyin, *Jiao Juyin on Theatre: A Collection of Critical Essays (Jiao Juyin Xiju Lunwen Ji)* (Shanghai: Literature and Arts Press, 1962), p.223. The writer's own translation. The original terms are: "jiulianhuan," and "lianhuan tao."

³³ Ma Ye, *Dramatic Concept of Time and Space (Xiju Yishu Shikou Lun)* (Beijing: Chinese Theatre Press, 1988), p.128. The writer's own translation. The original term is "xianglian shi."

³⁴ See Lan Fan, "Linear Art and Dimensional Art: A Comparison between the Chinese and Western Dramatic Structures" ("Dianxian de Yishu he Bankuai de Yishu: Zhongxi Xiju Jiegou Bijiao"), *Shanghai Theatre (Shanghai Xiju)*, 113 (1988), 29-31 (p.29). The writer's own translation. The original terms are "dianxian shi jiegou" and "chuanzhu shi jiegou."

³⁵ Li Yu, "Leisurely Reflections upon Drama", in *Collected Essays of Ancient Chinese Dramatic Theory*, p.64. The writer's own translation. The original term is "mizhenxian."

conflicts, and which, combined together, complete the whole process of a story's occurrence, development and conclusion, the structure of Chinese drama requires a clear chain of temporally developed events, with detailed elaboration of each individual event according to the sequence of time. Other events, whether directly or indirectly related to the story, should also be described completely in the major progress of the plot. This form of structural unity enables each individual dramatic event to become a story in itself which can be staged independently wherever and whenever required on particular occasions, in particular circumstances. This is perhaps one of the reasons why traditional Chinese plays are not divided into acts, but just scenes, called *chu* or *zhe*, marked by the entry and exit of actors on stage.

The dramatic conflict of *The Tale of the White Snake (Bai She Zhuan)*³⁶ occurs with the efforts of the monk Fahai to break up the happy marriage between the heroine Bai Shuzhen (the white snake) and the hero Xu Xian. This should serve as the exposition of the play. Chinese theatre, however, devises a long vertical development line comprising all the related incidents. Well before the monk makes his appearance, the play starts with a description of the heroine's meeting and perfunctory conversation with the hero while she, accompanied by her maid Xiao Qin (the green snake), leaves the mountain to visit the beautiful West Lake. It is followed by her borrowing an umbrella from Xu Xian, who then comes to claim it back two days later. It is further followed by a series of events: the engagement, a wedding ceremony, the setting-up of a herbalist's shop, etc. The whole progress of the plot becomes a consecutive chain which dramatizes in a chronological order individual, yet interlinking stories starting from "Leaving the mountain", "Sightseeing by the

³⁶ A large number of popular plays in the repertoires of the classical Chinese theatre are very difficult to date, because they are usually adaptations by different hands, often anonymous, from the same ancient novels, stories, legends, or folklores. Different schools of traditional drama in China may have different, sometimes up to forty or fifty, versions of one same dramatic story, and leading actors may also have their own performance texts. Otherwise indicated, as in the case of established classical plays by famous Chinese dramatists, the dates of the plays cited in this thesis are left blank. And stories and structures of the plays analyzed are mainly taken from the repertoire of Peking Opera, unless otherwise indicated.

lake", through "Borrowing an umbrella", "Getting married", "Sudden change", "Stealing the herbs", "Demanding the return of the husband", "Fight under the water", and finally concluding with "Meeting at the broken bridge".

Another typical example of the interlinked-ring unity is *Woman Marshal* (*Yang Jia Jiang*). In the first scene, the hero Yang Zhongbao, the woman marshal's husband, upon taking orders to command the vanguard unit of the army, hears summoning drums from the marshal's tent (backstage) and dashes off to report. The following scene, however, starts with the summoning call by drum beating again in the woman marshal's tent to briefings prior to the military campaign. It seems that time has been pushed back, or there is an unnecessary repetition of what has already occurred in the previous scene. In fact, however, this is characteristic of the arrangement of scenes which are the basic division units in Chinese drama. From the beginning to the end of a play, one scene follows another in such a closely interlinked fashion that there is always a fast change of time and place, and a fast change of events as well, amidst continuing songs, music or drum beats.

Like Aristotle who divides dramatic plots into two sorts, simple and complex, in Chinese theatre, the unity of interlinked scenes also falls into two categories: one is single linear structure, and the other, multiple linear structure. While Aristotle showed disapproval of simple plots because "there is no probability or necessity for the order in which the episodes follow one another,"³⁷ single linear structure is a very common and popular constructional arrangement in Chinese drama. By single linear structure is meant dramatic plot based on only one story which develops in a simple straightforward fashion, according to the sequence of time, for a single theme, throughout a whole play. It is similar to plain story-telling with one chapter after another being narrated chronologically. A typical example is the popular play *Lian Shanpo and Zhu Yintai* (*Lian Shanpo yu Zhu Yintai*). It is the tragic story of a man who kills himself by beating his head against the gravestone of his loved one because

³⁷ Aristotle, *Poetics*, p.34

he realizes too late that the deceased was a beautiful girl disguised as a boy who fell secretly in love with him during years of study together. They had to go their separate ways upon graduation. Later she died of hopeless waiting for him to come when forced to marry a man chosen by her family. All the different stages of the story are arranged in progressive scenes in the play according to the strict sequence of time, starting from "Vowing into brotherhood", "Classmates", through "Walking eighteen *li* to see him off" (one *li* is equivalent to half a kilometre), "Meeting again at the pavilion", "Forced to marry", and finally "Mourning at the grave". A single linear structure like this has the advantage of making the plot development concentrated, condensed and concise. In Li Yu's words, "There may be innumerable dramatic persons in a play, yet they must be created for one person's sake; there may be innumerable events, yet they must be so structured as to serve for one major event only."³⁸ Single linear development of plot, for Li Yu, is the most popular, as "even little children can understand it and remember it by heart."³⁹

In a multiple structure, dramatic actions develop in the same continuous and unified manner as in a single linear structure. The only difference is that there are more than two storylines instead of one, which develop either as the main one and the auxiliary one(s) intertwined together, or as parallels with each other. This fact also differentiates the structure from Aristotle's idea of complex plots in which the "continuous" and "recognizable" developments, "reversals," more often than not "grow out of the very structure of the plot itself," and the causes of all these events lead to a particular, unavoidable outcome.⁴⁰ No matter how many actions may develop out of either the main plot or sub-plot(s) in Chinese drama, they are all put

³⁸ Li Yu, "Leisurely Reflections upon Drama", in *Collected Essays of Ancient Chinese Dramatic Theory*, p.64. The English text used here is the writer's own free translation, as the original, a four-character phrase "yirenyishi" is too precise and rich in connotations to be translated as "one figure one event."

³⁹ *ibid.* The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "sanchi tongzi, liaoliao yu xin, bianbian yu kou."

⁴⁰ Aristotle, *Poetics*, p. 35

together in chronological order and respectively described in great detail. One of the metaphorical maxims for traditional Chinese play-making declares: "Several flowers are blossoming at the same time, each deserving a description of its beauty."⁴¹ The flowers here refer to the independent, yet inseparable stories underlining a play. Descriptions of them combine to show the beauty of all of them, i.e. the play, as a whole.

A good example of this kind of structure is *Romance of the West Chamber* (*Xi Xiang Ji*, by Wang Shipu, written between 1295-1307) which consists of two inter-related plot lines: one is the fight of Zhang Sheng, Yinyin and her maid Hongnian as a group against the old lady; the other is the misunderstanding between Zhang Shen and his love Yinyin as well as her maid. The two plot lines intertwine together in a linear fashion through various scenes like "Walk in the temple", "The temple under siege", "Denying the marriage", "Listening to a musical instrument", "Fight over the letter", "Denying the letter", etc., and finally are linked with each other at the end when Zhang Shen passes the Imperial Examination and goes back triumphantly to marry Yinyin.

The structure of traditional Chinese drama which depends on a unity or necklace of interlinked rings results in a different fashion of dramatic conflict from that of traditional Aristotelian drama. The linear pattern of interlinked scenes placed side by side in a chronological progressive development of plot comprises intensifying dramatic conflicts which are broken up into individual conflicting points and exist respectively in different scenes. The end of the play is predictably the culmination of the conflicts, or the crisis. This can be presented by several different methods.

Firstly, to attain the goal of one particular action, the structure of consecutive scenes of building up tensions is adopted, in which each scene can be regarded as a point of conflict. For example, a regional play of North China *After the Reunion* (*Da*

⁴¹ Quoted from Ma Ye, *Dramatic Concept of Time and Space*, p.130. The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Hua kai su duo, ge biao yi zhi."

Tuan Yuan) adapted from an item of traditional drama *Shi Tianwen* consists of nine scenes, "Reunion", "Private meeting", "Sudden encounter", "Arrest", "Interrogation", "Stopping the torture", "Breaking into the court-room", "Meeting in the prison" and "Recognizing the father". There is a conflict in each scene, which builds up as the plot develops, and culminates at the end.

Secondly, different types of scene are adopted according to the requirements of different conflicts. There are various kinds of scene in traditional Chinese drama, which include *zheng chang* (i.e. major scenes of considerable length), *guo chang* (i.e. interludes), *yuan chang* (scenes in which an actor walks round to complete a circle on the stage to show both time and place have changed), *diao chang* (scenes, whether major or minor, wherein strong tension is built up by short actions), and so on. One of the popular mottoes for play-making in China reads: "Take your time when you have got something to say; and cut short if you have got nothing to talk about."⁴² This is perhaps one of the reasons why so many kinds of scene forms have been devised for stage production. These different forms are combined either to present a minor conflict or set up the atmosphere for a forthcoming crisis. They enable the whole play to become, as believed by Chinese theatre practitioners, an organic entity. *Big Gathering of Heroes (Qun Ying Hui)* is a good example in this respect. The play is an adaptation of several chapters from the novel *The Tale of the Three Kingdoms (Sanguo Yanyi)*. The armies of Wu Country and Han Country are gathering on each side of the Yangtze River in a place of extreme strategical significance called Red Cliff. Cao Cao, the commander of the Han army, sends Jiang Gan, one of his staff officers, across the river to persuade Zhou Yu, the Wu army commander, to surrender. Zhou purposefully creates chances for Jiang to steal a forged letter of surrender sent over from Cao's army, which leads to Cao's execution of two top generals of his river forces. Chuge Liang, the intelligent chief of staff of Shuo Country, who comes to

⁴² Quoted from Lan Fan, *Comparative Chinese and Western Drama (Zhongxi Xiju Bijiao Lungao)* (Shanghai: Xuclin, 1992), p.450. The writer's own translation. The original saying is: "You hua ze chang, wu hua ze duan."

assist Wu Country in the campaign, solves the problem of arms shortage by collecting a large amount of arrows on the straw boats which he sends across the river at night in a feigned attack to provoke the Han army's bowmen. Two generals of Wu's army, under Zhou's instruction, run away to join Cao and talk him into chaining up all his battle boats. Predicting weather conditions correctly, Chuge helps Zhou launch the campaign in which he succeeds in burning all Cao's boats amidst strong gusts of east wind. In the dramatization of the story, only three of the thirty-one scenes take the form of *zheng chang* or major scenes, which are "Jiang Gan stealing the letter", "Borrowing arrows with straw boats", and "Making timely use of east wind". The rest are either presented in short *diao chang* or suspense scenes such as scene 1 "Zhou Yu holding a meeting in his tent", and scene 8 "Cao Cao rebuking Jiang Gan", or short *guo chang* (interludes) like scene 29 "Cao's soldiers abandoning their boats", scene 30 "Zhou Yu abandoning his boat", etc. The short, episodic descriptions of actions serve the purpose of creating the intensifying atmosphere of the approaching crisis and pave the path which leads to the great dramatic conflict in the last scene of the decisive military engagement.

Thirdly, each single scene in Chinese theatre can be a major action, a resolution of one dramatic conflict. The scenes of "Walk in the Temple", "Making poems together", "Denying the marriage", "Listening to a musical instrument", "Fight over the letter", "Interrogating the maid", "Nightmare", and so on in *Romance of the West Chamber* are typical examples of the kind. Wang Jide, a Ming Dynasty theatre critic, points out that "there is only one brain in each scene of *Romance of the West Chamber* [...] [which creates] an impressive image of a single-handed warrior with a lance on his horse fighting triumphantly here and there, all alone."⁴³ Wang's idea of the "brain" does not mean the main idea of a piece of literary work. It refers to the concept of one complete, rounded action in one scene. Xu Fuza, another Ming

⁴³ Wang Jide, "Rhythm of Music" ("Qulu"), in *Collected Essays of Ancient Chinese Dramatic Theory*, pp.53-56 (p.54). The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Xixianji meidao zhi shi yige tounao [...] Danqiangpima, hengchongzhizhuang, wubukeren."

Dynasty critic, voices the same opinion when he says that none of the scenes of a play can be staged if the "brains" are muddled, which implies that dramatic scenes cannot do without each containing a major, complete action.⁴⁴

Brecht's non-Aristotelian episodic structure is also characterized by a generally progressive development of tensions and conflicts towards the climax. However, unlike the constructional principles of the classical Chinese theatre which resort to a linear development of plot so as to make it easy the understanding of audiences, Brecht's construction of dramatic events projects the critical effectiveness of the play, which stems in part from its arousal and reversal of conventional expectations.

Mister Puntila and His Man Matti (1940) is a loosely connected series of twelve scenes about the lusty, expensive, bibulous landlord Puntila and his clever chauffeur Matti who nurses his master through the scrapes that his vitality and lack of circumspection get him into. There are various inter-related scenes dealing with drunken carousings (scenes 1 & 11), sexual adventures (scenes 3 & 6), a hiring fair (scene 4), farm-hands (scene 5), milk maids (scene 8), an engagement party (scene 9), squabbles over property (scene 9), talk of land and inheritance (scene 11), etc. Through these scenes progressively emerges the contemptible character of Puntila who alternates pious proclamations with unscrupulous egoism. When drunk he proposes universal brotherhood, offering work on generous terms to labourers and marriage indiscriminately to local women; when sober, however, he is ruthless and calculating, and cancels all his promises. Thus in the figure and behaviour of Puntila is demonstrated the paradox of the attractive benevolence and its inherent dishonesty, which reverses the expectation of a happy end.

⁴⁴ Xu Fuza, "Conversations among Village Folks" ("Sanjiachun Laowei Tan"), in *Collected Essays of Ancient Chinese Dramatic Theory*, pp.241-247 (p.243). The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Tounao tai luan [...] bubian dengchang."

Puntila's daughter Eva is being wooed by an insipid but well-connected diplomat, but she hankers after her father's chauffeur Matti. Matti, whose previous experience in working with landlords enables him to be fully aware of the class basis of Puntila's behaviour, never loses his grip on material realities. He always tries to remind those farm-hands as well as those local women of the inevitable disappointment they are going to have. So when Puntila tries to marry Eva to him instead of the diplomat, it is Matti who resists, despite his interest in Eva. In Brecht's Finnish source, where the daughter marries the chauffeur, who turns out to be a young engineer and therefore one of her own class, the social conflict is neutralized with a happy end, which is a marriage of social equals restored to their "rightful" station.⁴⁵ In Brecht's play, the plot of the willing lovers thwarted by the father is completely reversed. Matti not only refuses to marry Eva, but turns his back on his employer as well.

Through the loosely connected scenes of the play, Brecht contrasts the causally coherent structure of the well-made drama with a reversal of what would otherwise be expected as a happy end. He shows that the expectations of a happy end require social and economical change for their realization. The negative lessons emphasized are that oil and water do not mix, that capitalists cannot be trusted.

Each individual scene in Chinese drama can be a major action, a point of conflict and a resolution of that conflict. Such a way of structuring events has the advantage of skipping over time and place, allowing the dramatist the freedom of selecting and compressing the most appropriate incidents without bothering about the intervening time and change of settings. This kind of structure anticipates that which Brecht adopted for some of his major plays such as *Life of Galileo* (1937-1939) and *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1938-1939). However, in *Mother Courage and Her Children*, for example, unlike classical Chinese dramatists who would use songs or verses by the actor in his self-introduction to tell the audience about the passing of

⁴⁵ See Bertolt Brecht, *Collected Plays*, 6iii, p.108

time or change of setting, Brecht uses prefixed sentences which may be either matter-of-fact or comic in tone, such as "The great religious war has now lasted sixteen years" (at the beginning of Scene 9), and "Tilly's victory at Leipzig costs Mother Courage four shirts" (before Scene 5). Each of the twelve scenes of the play, narrated chronologically with a time span of twelve years and changes of locale in seven European states, is preceded with short expository sentences. These prefixed sentences have not only the function of informing the audience about the time interval between the individual scenes and the shift of setting, but also, more importantly, the function of creating for the public a critical attitude towards historiography and its indifference to all individual human details, helping to discriminate against "monumental" history in favour of the real "little" history of poor people who experience the whole burden of reality, the Thirty Years War.

Like the unity of interlinked scenes in Chinese drama where each scene contains an independent story with tensions and conflict of its own, *Mother Courage and Her Children* is characterized by a static structure which carefully balances individual scenes against each other. Scenes full of tense action are followed by more harmonious ones in which reflective elements predominate. Starting from scene 1 where the dramatic conflict centres around the sergeant and the officer trying to recruit the boys and Mother Courage's desperate yet futile effort to stop them, tense action follows in one scene after another. Eilif is honoured for his "bravery" (scene 2), Swiss Cheese, as the army paymaster, is arrested and shot (scene 3), Mother Courage submits a complaint about the damage to her wagon (scene 4), she loses four officer's shirts and Katrin finds a baby (scene 5), and Katrin is mutilated (scene 6). The rest of the scenes, with the exception of scenes 7 and 10 which can be regarded as *guo chang* or interludes, and the last concluding scene which sees Mother Courage harness herself alone to her empty wagon still doggedly in pursuit of the trade in war, are full of more intensified dramatic conflicts. During a short interval of peace, Eilif is condemned to death for the same "bravery" he displayed previously; war restarts, Mother Courage stops Katrin from running away and mother and daughter go on with

their wagon business, until Kattrin is shot for trying to alert the town to a surprise attack by the army.⁴⁶

The dramatic tension in Brecht's play, similar to that in Chinese drama, is limited to the action within individual scenes. Such a way of forming a dramatic event is perhaps best embodied in the third section of the third scene. Swiss Cheese has been arrested and is to die unless Mother Courage can raise some money. It is a matter of life and death. Yet Brecht creates suspense by three elements of retardation. The first appears in the haggling conversation about the wagon. Yvette, pompously "discussing" the matter with her recently hooked colonel, wants to buy it, while Mother Courage wants to pawn it in hope that once Swiss Cheese is released he will recover the regimental cash so that she can redeem the wagon. When an agreement is reached between the two women, a further hindrance emerges. Yvette, instead of saving Swiss Cheese, falls greedily upon the wagon. While Mother Courage has to wait, the camp prostitute goes to negotiate with the army and returns to say that the cashbox has been thrown into the river. This creates a third retarding element. The suspense is concentrated almost to the point of physical pain. Yvette is sent away again, to bargain about the bribe. Mother Courage's waiting almost stretches time to an eternity. Finally Yvette returns to report that the full original amount cannot be lowered. Mother Courage sends her away for a final time. But it is too late now. Amidst the silence of her waiting while the other people are polishing knives and glasses, the court martial drums roll. Swiss Cheese is condemned. Yvette returns to report his execution and reproaches Mother Courage. She also tells her that the body will be brought for a final test to see whether Mother Courage did not know him after all. The tension here is tightened up anew at one last point. In order not to betray herself and save her other children, she has to deny her dead son. As one critic comments here, "The remarkable aspect of this incredibly compact scene is that every

⁴⁶ For a detailed description of the plot, the chronicle, theme, language, songs, and *Gestus* of the play, see Alfred D. White, *Bertolt Brecht's Great Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1978), pp.65-112

section is filled with social reality even to the intonation of the characters. No false pathos, no 'noble' misery beclouds the pellucid atmosphere of the tragic action."⁴⁷

Eric Bentley defines "closed drama" as plays constructed with an observation on the formal structure which contains a late point of attack from which to look back on the story from its climax are dramas of closed structure. The opposite is "open drama," those with an open, or diffuse dramatic structure that starts from the beginning of the narrative and proceeds through it in many scenes.⁴⁸ Both Chinese theatre and Brecht's epic procedure belong to the second category. Shakespeare's plays could be regarded as belonging to the type of open structure with a sequence of scenes technically flexible and mobile, undominated by fixed scenes and persistent situations and a moment corresponding to a flow of action. Hence, some Western comparatists have tried to compare Brecht's epic theatre with Elizabethan playwrights, arguing that Brecht's open structure "derives, essentially, from the Elizabethan drama and especially from Shakespeare; through Büchner and others."⁴⁹ Some even describe Brecht as the nearest equivalent to Shakespeare ever, a "Shakespeare reborn."⁵⁰ Ideas like these may be sound from a Westerners' point of view, especially with regard to the vast influence of Shakespearean drama upon the modern European stage. Apart from the fact that the broad outline of Brecht's *Edward II* (1924) was taken from Christopher Marlowe, it is also well-known that Brecht adapted Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* into *The Roundheads and the Peakheads* (1931-1934) and *Coriolanus* into *Coriolan* (1951-1953),⁵¹ and even some of his major works, such as *Life of Galileo* and *Mother Courage and Her Children*, can be regarded as bearing close analogies with the Shakespearean chronicles in that both

⁴⁷ Franz Norbert Mennemeier, "Mother Courage and Her Children", in *Brecht: A Collection of Critical Essays*, pp.138-150 (p.149)

⁴⁸ Eric Bentley, *The Playwright as Thinker* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), p.123

⁴⁹ Raymond Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (London: Hogarth, 1987), p.289

⁵⁰ Jan Needle and Peter Thomson, *Brecht*, p.19

⁵¹ John Willett, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht*, p.25, p.42, p.63

"sweep across time and space in order to show how the problems of intellectual honesty on the one hand and chaotic war on the other cut across the (class-determined) self-interest of two immensely live and human characters."⁵² It is in terms of Brecht's relations with the Elizabethans, particularly Shakespeare, that his theatre is regarded by some critics as a return to the "orthodox theatre," if it also means "the mainstream of European classical tradition."⁵³

Brecht seems to have also benefited from the Elizabethans, but Shakespeare's influence was by no means exclusive. Although John Willett tries to argue that "the rambling methods of the Elizabethan theatre" fitted Brecht's episodic structure of "one scene following shapelessly on another so as to lead to a cumulative rather than a conclusive effect," and that Brecht saw it attained in Shakespeare (not in the average Shakespearean production),⁵⁴ he also agrees that there were other sources of influence, each of which "brought him something different." He says:

The persistent influence of Büchner and Lenz [...] and the Elizabethans gave him the example of a loose sequence of scenes of great geographical and chronological scope; Piscator showed him how to speed and amplify the story by mechanical means; the Japanese, through Dr Waley, taught him to cut narrative corners, and "deliver the contents" in a forceful yet unemotional way. These and other influences seem to fit logically together, [...] inextricably mixed.⁵⁵

To this list we may also add Indian drama which is also characterized by a loose, episodic structure,⁵⁶ and of course Chinese theatre.

Many critics have pointed out the structural similarities between Brecht's epic theatre and the narrative and episodic Chinese theatre. Martin Esslin, for example,

⁵² *ibid*, p.121

⁵³ *ibid*, p.123

⁵⁴ *ibid*, p.121, p.123

⁵⁵ *ibid*, p.123

⁵⁶ Antony Tatlow notes that Brecht possessed translations of the two best known Sanskrit plays, *Sakuntala* and *The Little Clay Cart*, and described the former as a better exemplification of Indian dramatic theory, though the latter is the more realistic. See Antony Tatlow, *The Mask of Evil*, p.283

selects seven characteristic innovations of Brecht's theatre which recall Chinese theatre: episodic structure, narrative drama, *Gestus* as "stylized expression of social behaviour," economy of means, various techniques such as stage lighting, the demonstration of scene-shifting, and the presence of musicians on the stage.⁵⁷ The scenes in Brecht's dramas, however episodically they may develop and however loosely they may be connected with each other, are composed of individual incidents which have their respective "basic gest." Through these scenes we are shown human relations as revealed through actions and events instead of human nature, psychology or character. It is perhaps because of Brecht's belief in the clarity of line and the gestic definition of dramatic incident that some of his plays are constructed in such a way that they can be presented in excerpts (such as *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*, *Schweik in the Second World War*, and even *Mother Courage and Her Children*) much as Chinese operas are. The titles that Brecht often assigns to individual scenes endow them with a sense of autonomy, so that through sufficient familiarity with his drama, one carefully chosen act from each of three or four might furnish as unified an experience as the complete presentation of a whole play.⁵⁸

Some critics, however, remain unconvinced of Martin Esslin's comparison. Antony Tatlow, for example, not only argues that all the above seven aspects of characteristics of Brecht's epic theatre as reminiscent of Chinese theatre "also exist in the Japanese theatre,"⁵⁹ but also contends that "some of the most interesting parallels between Brecht's plays and the Chinese theatre rest on further analogies of which he was in all probability unaware."⁶⁰

⁵⁷ The last four of these are mainly related to techniques of production, on the use of bare stage or scarcity of stage props, the uniform white light, Property man on stage amidst performance to move furniture for the next scene and the unhidden musicians, all typical techniques of Chinese theatre. For discussions on these four aspects, see Martin Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work*, pp.128-139, and also Leonard Cabell Pronko, *Theatre East and West*, pp.58-61

⁵⁸ See Leonard Cabell Pronko, *Theatre East and West*, p.58

⁵⁹ Antony Tatlow, *The Mask of Evil*, p.223

⁶⁰ *ibid*, p.283

Although it is hardly likely that Brecht knew about the ancient Chinese dramatic theories, which still remain largely untranslated, he was aware of the formal features of Chinese theatre. This is proven by his own acknowledgement in "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction". He admits: "Stylistically speaking, there is nothing all that new about the epic theatre. Its expository character and its emphasis on virtuosity bring it close to the old Asiatic theatre."⁶¹ This essay, unpublished in Brecht's lifetime, was written about 1936, one year after he had witnessed Mei Lanfang's acting. Even if there is no bearing of evidence about his visit to Moscow in the essay, we are left to surmise about the possible firsthand experience which he acquired with the structure of Chinese drama through the performances which he saw.

When Mei Lanfang visited Moscow in 1935, he brought with him six items of classical Chinese drama which he selected particularly for the occasion. These six items were *Fisherman's Vengeance*, *Killing the Tiger General*, *Drunken Beauty*, *Cosmos Point* (*Yuzhou Feng*), *On the Riverbank* (*Fenhe Wan*) and *Romancing the Fortress* (*Hongni Guan*). Whether or not Brecht went to see all of these plays still remains a mystery. But he did watch *Fisherman's Vengeance*, a typical Chinese narrative drama which consists of sixteen episodically developed scenes. With regard to the fact that all of Brecht's major plays (Such as *The Good Person of Szechuan*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *Life of Galileo*) were written from the late 1930s onwards, and the conventionally constructed *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* (1929-1931), one of his early important works, was re-numbered into eleven scenes when it was finally staged in 1959, his response to the Chinese structure as a model is of unneglectable significance.

That Brecht was aware of the formal features of Chinese drama can also be argued in terms of the formal structure that he adopted for his version of the old Chinese legend of the chalk circle. Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is divided into two parts comprising five scenes with an additional prologue. Such a structure is

⁶¹ Bertolt Brecht, "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction", in *Brecht on Theatre*, p.75

similar to that in the Chinese Yuan drama which is generally called *zaju*. The Yuan *zaju* (poetic drama set to music) usually consists of four or five units called *zhe* (literally translated as "fold," meaning individual scene in a play) plus one *xiezi* or more (literally translated as "wedge,"⁶² a fixing device in joints or cracks). Compared to that of the Yuan drama, the structure of Brecht's play can be described as falling into five *zhe* plus one *xiezi*.

Xiezi in the Chinese Yuan *zaju* or drama can be placed both at the beginning and in between two scenes in a play. When it is put at the outset of a play, it is the equivalent of a prologue in Western theatre, functioning generally as an introduction to the forthcoming story, by one character having the singing role. It becomes more than the Western-type interlude when it is placed between two individual scenes, during which the spectators are not only told what is going to happen in the following scene, but are also offered further explanation about or comment on what has already taken place in the previous scene, again by one character singing. Brecht chose to keep his *xiezi* or prologue at the beginning of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, not merely as an introduction to one of the old legends which he admitted came from China, but more importantly for the purpose of putting forward thought-provoking questions regarding human nature and relationships. Responding to a proposed cut of the prologue, Brecht said: "In this parable play, questions should be brought forth according to practical needs." He believed that by cutting it "we could neither see why it should become no longer *The Chinese Chalk Circle* (and its old test) nor understand why it should be called *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*."⁶³ Therefore, Brecht's *xiezi* or

⁶² See J. I. Grump, *Chinese Theatre in the Days of Kublai Khan* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1980), p.88, and p.182

⁶³ Quoted from Li Yijian, "Brecht and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*" ("Bulaixite he Gaojiasuo Hui Lan Ji"), *Fujian Theatre (Fujian Xiju)*, 1 (1984), 41-43 (p.42). Collected under the title of "A Diversion" by Brecht in 1956 into his theoretical writings "Dialectics in the Theatre", it remains untranslated as John Willett believes it to be "seemingly not even by Brecht" (*Brecht on Theatre*, p.282). My translation is based on the Chinese version which is as follows:

prologue performs an important function. It tells the audience that a recreation of the old Chinese story could help to solve practical problems of the modern age, i.e. the fight over the possession of the valley. It explicitly conveys the renewed theme of the play, which is more than the reinstatement of real motherhood by calling for social justice as in the old Chinese play, but rather, by praising the humanity as displayed by simple labouring women, and by stating the truth of "that what there is shall belong to those who are good for it," or, more specifically, that the valley shall belong "to the waterers, that it shall bear fruit." In a word, the *xiezi* or prologue expresses a new relationship between human beings in an ideal society. In terms of this, what was originally a Chinese trial play has become a social play. However unrelated it may seem to the main story of the play, in the process of transplanting the Chinese Yuan play, Brecht has endowed the *xiezi*, an indispensable component of the Chinese dramatic structure, with new functions as corresponding to his idea of theatre for instruction, for in it, apart from telling the audience about where the story came from, there is also a direct statement by the storyteller that it is actually the villagers debating over the valley who are going to act out the story, wearing masks. Knowing this and also being told that the play consists of two stories which last a few hours, the audience are made aware of the fact that they are going to watch a *play*, and are therefore mentally prepared to keep a distance between themselves and the stage figures, i.e. to guard against empathetical correspondence with what is going on in the theatre. This is one of the methods through which Brecht hoped to attain alienation effects in the play. By using this, he alienates his audience from the life depicted on stage in the first place, before the play starts, and reminds them that they should

Zai zhe piyu she juben zhong, wenti zhi tichu ying you shiji zhi biyaoxing yindao chulai [...] ru shanqu zhege xumu, ze ji kan bu chulai weishenme zhe juben buzai shi *Zhongguo Hui Lan Ji*, (he ta de lao panguan), ye bu zhi ta weishenme yao chengzuo *Gaojiasuo Hui Lan Ji* liao.

observe "what happens *between* people that provides them with all the material that they can discuss, criticize, alter."⁶⁴

Apart from the similar but revigorated use of *xiezi* or prologue, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* also shows an interesting common structure of its main story with that of the Chinese Yuan drama. Its five scenes, each numbered and subtitled, can be compared to the Chinese *zhe* which is an individual scene with rounded and complete actions of its own. As has been discussed previously, the interlinking and self-contained scenes in classical Chinese dramas can often be extracted for a single, independent performance, becoming what is called *zhezixi* (a play of one selected scene). There are thousands of these plays still popular in China, maybe as a result of the concession made to the viewing habits of the audience who know the dramatic stories of the plays too well to go from the beginning to the end again and again, and who might prefer to see the performances of guest stars in particular roles in particular play extracts, on special occasions. Like the traditional Chinese dramatic structure, each *zhe* or scene in Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, while being an indispensable component in the organic whole of the play, maintains its relative individual independence, with a rounded action of its own, becoming a play within a play. The fourth *zhe* or scene 4 (i.e. Part Two scene 1) which is sub-titled as "The Story of the Judge", for example, describes events taking place prior to and after Azdak as judge. As one of the two main story-lines, it finally leads to the test of the chalk circle. Without a depiction of those stories centring around Azdak (his experiences during the revolt and the three cases which he tries after he has become judge), the image of the character portrayed could become over simplified, and less dialectical. It is a scene which contains a complete drama in its own right. (The three cases which Azdak tries can be regarded as independent stories, too.) It might well

Renata Berg-Pam also notes that when questioned about the artistic wisdom of the prologue, Brecht insisted that "he could not really have made clear why he changed the Chinese chalk circle to the Caucasian one without the prologue." See Renata Berg-Pam, *Bertolt Brecht and China*, p.199

⁶⁴ Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre", in *Brecht on Theatre*, p.200

serve as a play of one selected scene for an individual performance, just like a Chinese *zhezixi*.

Brecht uses "story" (and sometimes "narrative") to refer to the structuring of dramatic events. He says: "The parts of the story have to be carefully set off one against another by giving each its own structure as a play within the play," and "each single incident has its basic gest."⁶⁵ This "basic gest" in the last scene of the play, for example, is the resort to the test of the chalk circle, which again can be singled out as an individual story for stage performance.

That Brecht wanted the episodes or parts of his "story" to be connected distinguishably with each other had much to do with his theory of alienation effects. Brecht, who repeatedly emphasized the importance of "story" in his "A Short Organum for the Theatre" by saying it is "the soul of drama," "the heart of the theatrical performance," or "the theatre's greatest operation,"⁶⁶ believed that by splitting his "story" into limited individual episodes containing specific gest or gests, his audience might be given a chance to interpose their judgement. The audience might be amazed by the inconsistencies in their various attitudes in the first place, but when the "story" as a whole finally gave them a chance to pull the inconsistencies together, they were expected to have achieved a thorough understanding of the character portrayed, now complete with all its individual features, "as it were by a single leap."⁶⁷

Ronald Speirs tries to warn us against being over exclusive in the study of the various possible theatre traditions from which Brecht may have benefited. He points out:

To describe Brecht's amalgamation of contemporary subject matter with formal and stylistic devices borrowed from the drama of the past

⁶⁵ *ibid*, pp.200-201

⁶⁶ *ibid*, pp.183-200

⁶⁷ *ibid*, p.200

as a technique of alienation is acceptable as far as it goes, but this term should not be allowed to obscure the variety of uses to which he puts this method of composition. [...] Without such recourse to traditional models of plot-structure and character, however ironically deployed, it would have been difficult for him to translate economic processes into the language of the stage.⁶⁸

As the previous discussions show, Brecht's adoption of episodic structure for his theatre was related to the simplicity of structure and expression that characterized the modern German political theatre to depict the class struggles of the entire social strata, and was more importantly decided by his anti-Aristotelian stance and reaction against traditional dramatic theatre in the West, representing a continuation of the nineteenth-century German tradition. In his repudiation of the well-made drama, Brecht may have benefited from a vast source of theatre traditions, either past, present or foreign, including his German predecessors and contemporary political theatre practitioners, the Elizabethans, and also possibly Indian and Japanese theatres. Yet among all of those which may have combined to contribute to the aesthetic-theatrical changes in Brecht's epic theatre, Chinese theatre is perhaps the one to which Brecht brought himself closest. This is shown by the application of his concept of gestic acting to the construction of dramatic incidents. The relative autonomy of individual scenes where such incidents are respectively depicted enables conflicts or tensions to be built up and solved right inside themselves. Not only are these scenes independently narrated, they are also chronologically connected and developed to reach a conclusion where the inner psyche of the characters is not explored but the social function of their attitudes and behaviour is emphasized. Such an aesthetic recalls the unity of interlinked autonomous scenes in Chinese drama, though the latter may have been devised to ensure an easy understanding for mass popularity. Brecht's response to the Chinese dramatic structure as a model for his drama suggests common constructional principles shared by both Brecht and the ancient Chinese dramatists. Brecht responded to them for the purpose of rendering what he understood as the

⁶⁸ Ronald Speirs, *Bertolt Brecht* (London: Macmillan, 1987), p.79

"economic processes" into the stage language for his socially or politically conscious epic theatre. This is perhaps where the effect of Chinese drama upon Brecht's epic drama lies.

Chapter III Brecht's Response to Chinese Dramatic Themes and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*

In the previous two chapters we have discussed how the elements of Chinese theatre tradition, among all the other sources of drama which Brecht may have also borrowed, could have led to modifications of his dramaturgy. Brecht's response to Chinese drama, however, culminated in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1944-1945), where the combination of many of the epic devices, such as episodically developed plots, alienating methods of third-person exposition, the narrative devices of songs, choruses, and storyteller, the cool and dialectical objectivity of treating the characters and so on, suggests that Brecht was interested in the theatre form itself. If *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* can be regarded as a play where there is harmony between form and content, Chinese theatre appears to have played a constructive part in this process.

Before we begin to discuss how Brecht adapted the classical Chinese drama, we should first bear in our mind that the play was written in a particular social and historical context that had profound impact on the author. Brecht started to work on the play when he was eleven years in exile and three years in America. He became growingly aware that he had failed to make his mark in the West, and that America was not only rejecting him as an artist, but also viewing him suspiciously as a politically undesirable figure. The disillusionment with the "land of freedom" undoubtedly sharpened his political perception of Europe, though previously it had been the driving force behind his exile in America. As the war was drawing to a close, not because of America's entry into the European battlefields, but because of the Soviet Union's stoical resistance against and triumphant survival of the Nazi tanks that had crushed all the communism in the rest of Europe and conquered a vast stretch of the continental soil, Brecht had every reason to hope for a peaceful settlement of livelihood problems under the guidance of Communist trouble-shooter, in contrast to

the state of destructive competition under capitalism. This becomes more understandable when we recall the talks of a post-war settlement of Europe that started as early as 1941 between Churchill and Roosevelt and further included Stalin in 1943 at Teheran (which is in the Caucasian region). It was around this period of time that Brecht finally set to rewrite the Chinese *Chalk Circle* in the form of a full-length parable, not from a Chinese or Caucasian perspective, but from a European viewpoint, for it provided him with an appropriate tenor and vehicle to make some indirect, discrete comments on the post-war settlement and division of Europe planned for after the defeat of Germany, a mouthpiece for his Utopian pacificism after the carnage of another great world war as a result of capitalist expansion and competition.¹ Thus, we see in the prologue of his play that the Soviet citizens have not only just fought Hitler, they also live in communes, which, as different from all forms of capitalism, represent a state where the good of society and the good of the individual converge. The only thing that causes a little unpleasantness in the all pleasurable communal life is the individual's attachment to a particular piece of ground, which is amicably solved by the members of two disputing communes watching an ancient play about true motherhood..

On the other hand, Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* can also be viewed as a continuation of his experiment towards a more mature epic theatre. As a political writer who believed that his theatre was truly Marxist, he must still have had a vivid memory about the "anti-formalist" campaign. It was launched by Lukács and gained enough momentum under the Zhdanovite doctrine of "socialist realism," shortly after Brecht went into exile, to have many of his close colleagues, including Meyerhold, Tretiakov, Ernst Ottwalt and Carola Neher, arrested or executed. Although Brecht, along with many other left-wing modernist writers, also came under attack as "decadent" and "formalist" in contrast with Balzac or Tolstoy who were held as exemplars for twentieth-century dramatists, probably thanks to his inborn shrewdness

¹ See Maria Shevtsov, "The Caucasian Chalk Circle: The View from Europe", in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, pp.153-164 (p.162)

or foresight in political matters, he was reluctant to engage publicly in acrimonious debate, or in outright criticism of the Stalin régime (A safe passage was therefore guaranteed when he and his family went to USA via Siberia in 1941). The notes and essays, including "What Is Formalism?" which Brecht is said to have written as a reply, remained unpublished until many years later when there was no particular need to defend himself from accusations of formalism. In any case, Brecht was by no means beaten into the fold of a partisan art presenting downright heroes or villains. His best reply was his continued experimentation with epic drama precisely through techniques described by Lukács and Zhdanov as "formalist." The first example was his *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* which, with its montage of twenty-seven scenes and a catalogue of gestures, would have been dismissed by them as "subjectivist," though ironically it met with a cautious welcome.² The next examples were his major plays such as *The Good Person of Szechuan*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, including *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *Life of Galileo*, wherein the multi-dimensional characterizations are all underlined with the author's Marxist dialectics. Whereas to Lukács reality was governed by underlying forces beyond human control and beyond comprehension, Marxist materialist dialectics as Brecht believed in treat science and all human life not as static but as continually developing; that all causes, all effects, all relations are dynamic; that the time element must never be left out. Hence his characters are complicated living human beings, wrstling with consceince and the world around them, and capable of intervening in the process of shaping society.

Partly as a reply to the "anti-formalist" doctrine of "socialist realism," Brecht never renounced new forms and techniques. On top of this, he rediscovered old forms

² Robert Leach observes that Lukács made a cautious welcome of the publication of *The Informer*. This made Brecht feel that he must have overlooked the play as a whole, for to Lukács "a montage technique was incapable of revealing relations between the surface appearance of life and the reality of hidden social currents beneath." See Robert Leach, "Mother Courage and Her Children", in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, pp.128-138 (p.129)

into which new forms and techniques are organically interwoven so that they cease to be the instrument of an artificial, abstract didacticism. One noticeable example was his parables, a genre that gained in importance for him particularly after the mid-1930s' controversy on formalism. To Brecht, the parable was a form of writing in which the imagination was kept accountable to reason, the tendency towards autonomy of the aesthetic impulse being held in check by the obligation to write what was useful. The depiction of events and characters in such a genre of writing can be universal, regardless of any specific socio-cultural context, and tends to render general, abstract meaning into explicit, concrete truths about humanity. And besides, as it does not pretend to be anything other than a made-up story, clearly told to advance an argument, the parable has the kind of folk-tale, narrative quality that Brecht thought characterized his mature epic theatre in his continued attempt to guide the audience in a political process of learning and search for truths about humanity in a constantly changing environment.³

If it is dangerous to assume a simple linear development of epic drama through Lenz-Büchner tradition down to Brecht, it is equally dangerous to assume that parable is the ultimate target in Brecht's experiment with epic theatre. As a matter of fact, or quite contrary to his theories (Brecht was never afraid of showing contradictions between his theory and practice of theatre), he was later inclined to drop the term epic theatre in favour of "dialectics,"⁴ which, less restricted to the social

³ Ronald Speirs, *Bertolt Brecht*, p.139

⁴ Brecht returned to an earlier, but more explicit use of the term "dialectics" to describe his theatre, as he believed that the concept of epic theatre was "too slight and too vague for the kind of theatre intended," and "an effort is now being made to move on from the epic theatre to the dialectical theatre." Bertolt Brecht, "Appendices to the Short Organum", in *Brecht on Theatre*, pp.276-281 (p.276; p.281). In his last collection of theoretical writings entitled "Dialectics in the Theatre" (1956), he declares:

"Epic theatre" is too formal a term for the kind of theatre aimed at (and to some extent practised). Epic theatre is a prerequisite for these contributions, but it does not of itself imply that productivity and mutability of society from which they derive their main element of pleasure.

See the editor's note to "Appendices to the Short Organum", in *Brecht on Theatre*, p.282

conditions, including the techniques or internal effects, of epic theatre, emphasized an incomplete and continuing artistic and historical process.

Yet on the other hand, parable, with its stylistic characteristics of simplicity and easy assimilation, is indirect, cunning, and concrete in abstraction. It was a form of writing that seemed most suitable to the audience that Brecht might have conceived of during his life in exile, if he ever had one. In any case, it helped to expand and enrich the variety of dramatic methods as one aspect of the legacy he bequeathed to the modern German political theatre. Brecht himself had a clear idea about his different dramatic methods on trial in his practice of theatre. He says:

When I consider and compare my last plays, *Galileo*, *Mother Courage*, *Fear and Misery*, *The Good Person of Szechwan*, *Herr Puntila and His Servant Matti*, *The Rise of Ui* [all sic], I find them extremely lacking in uniformity. Even the genres are constantly changing. Biography, gestus tableau, parable, comedy of character written in popular idiom, historical farce---the plays diverge from one another like the stars in the new picture of the universe that physics has produced, as if here too some nucleus of drama had exploded.⁵

Another important parable which Brecht did not mention in the above quotation was *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. It followed almost immediately *The Good Person of Szechuan* (1939-1941, first staged in 1943) that presents itself from the outset as a rewrite of an ancient motif: Gods in search of good people to justify the continued existence of human beings. The old, familiar story about the search of the Gods invites the audience to make a reflective response by comparing it with their new, changed environment wherein they should ask themselves whether it is possible to survive if they are to preserve the virtues of human beings.

The form of parable as an artifice for a made-up, didactic story suffices to remind the audience of its theatricality in its own right. Hence there is no need for overtly artificial alienating devices. Although in *The Good Person of Szechuan* Brecht

⁵ Quoted from Anthony Waine, "The Legacy for German-Speaking Playwrights", in *Brecht in Perspective*, pp.192-207 (p.193)

still uses Chinese-style self-introduction, commenting songs and verses directed towards the audience, these methods are organically incorporated into the written text to construct a very strong Chinese presence, alongside quotations of the Chinese poet Po Chu-yi, despite the fact that the setting of Szechuan is no more than a mere fantasy of the playwright.

Similarly, the setting of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* has nothing to do with either the ancient or the twentieth-century China, the play being a Chinese legend revised to fit a chapter of a European state's medieval history, which is told to bear on the problem at hand. This is made clear in the framing prologue by the singer or storyteller, who, like the Gods in *The Good Person of Szechuan*, guides the audience through a learning process regarding property ownership (in a Utopian community). As the following discussions seek to show, by transplanting the Chinese drama into a parable, using it in conjunction with elements of the European theatre tradition, Brecht managed to produce one of his most mature, important plays which combines almost all the refinery of his epic methods and presents dialectically drawn characters.

To many critics, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* seems to be the best among all the plays that Brecht wrote.⁶ However, although regarding it as "a truly epic work

⁶ Martin Esslin, for example, in his accounting of this play and *Life of Galileo* as the two great plays of Brecht, claims it to be "the mellowest of all plays" in terms of the characterization of the heroine who is rewarded for her good deeds. He cites other plays such as *The Good Person of Szechuan*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, and *The Exception and the Rule* as bitter plays where "virtue brings no reward," and "the poor are mean and the rich are ruthless." See Martin Esslin, *Brecht: A Choice of Evils*, pp.237-239

In agreement with the general belief that the play is Brecht's best, James K. Lyon also points out that it is the one that "ranks among his most popular today." See James K. Lyon, *Bertolt Brecht in America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), p.131

Darko Suvin, in his support of the idea that it is Brecht's "most significant play," offers mainly three reasons: the most successful fusion of erotics and existential politics, the narrative unity of the structure

embodying many of Brecht's ideas, tastes, and talents," John Willett and Ralph Manheim also show their disapproval by describing it as an "awkward combination of two largely unrelated stories."⁷

The parallels between the Grusha and Azdak stories, which are supposed to happen simultaneously but are developed successively on the stage, show a temporal progression exemplifying the way Brecht composed his drama. Instead of giving the illusion that events are happening now and inviting the audience to become caught up in them, Brecht presents the two main stories in his play as a series of separate pictures which are not neatly dovetailed together, reminding the audience that they are observing past events which are over and done with. Leaving aside the Prologue, the importance of which has already been discussed in the previous chapter, the play starts with the story of Grusha coming to the rescue of a defenceless noble child, and moves straightforwardly and with concision, through events depicting Grusha's hazardous escape into the mountains where she has to marry a "dying" man in order to bring up the child, to the point of apparently total disaster for her and her foundling when the child is snatched away from her and she faces a trial. Then Brecht, in a brilliant technical coup, stops dead. When the second half of the play starts, Grusha and her child seem to have been totally forgotten. What is presented is the beginning of a separate story, which, too, moves forward concisely and in a straight line, covering stories of how the villainous village recorder Azdak becomes the Judge and how he tries cases by taking bribes and with wine bottles in his hands. When Grusha and Azdak come together in the final scene where the child is returned not to the biological mother, but to the nurturing one who has made many sacrifices in order to

and the concern for history as man-made destiny. See Darko Suvin, *To Brecht and Beyond: Soundings in Modern Dramaturgy* (Sussex: Harvester, 1984), p.153; pp.167-183

Jan Needle and Peter Thomson regard the play as a "masterpiece" in terms of objective characterization of "three-dimensional human beings," the mode of the ancient form of fairy story, and most important of all, harmonious interweaving of two disparate stories and lives of Azdak and Grusha. See Jan Needle and Peter Thomson, *Brecht*, pp.204-206

⁷ Bertolt Brecht, *Collected Plays*, VII, p.xiii

save and bring him up, there is a shock of realization that has a genuinely magical effect which, one can only feel with wonder, has brought this about.

Thus, the two seemingly "largely unrelated" stories of Grusha and Azdak are not only combined harmoniously, but the thematic structure of the stories also contribute to the organic unity of the parallels. If Brecht's own comment on Grusha as a "sucker"⁸ can be interpreted in terms of egoism and self-interest, such characteristics are even easier to discern in Azdak. Brecht's characterization of Grusha shows an individual crushed beneath overwhelming forces of social oppression. The most Grusha can hope for is bare survival, and for this, constant attention to her own interests is necessary. Azdak, on the other hand, is also marked by a similar conflict of interests. He regards himself as a rational human being and therefore is guided by principles of self-gratification and regard for his own skin. He tries cases in favour of the poor and oppressed while at the same time knowing that by doing so he exposes himself to crude retaliation from the oppressors once they are back in power. Both Grusha and Azdak derive their function from initial impulsive, "abnormal" humanist behaviour, namely, the saving of the child and the Grand Duke. This brings them first into trouble, so that they have to backslide into their old ways, but finally educates them respectively into true motherhood and judgeship. This theme therefore unites the two otherwise apparently unrelated stories: with the Grusha tale alone the play would have tipped over too much into a simplistic tale of human goodness; with the stress singularly on Azdak, the satire on justice would have been too cynical and one sided. Taken together, Brecht shows both two stories in a temporally progressive fashion until the two converge. Brecht's decision to handle his narrative in this way, which makes it appear to be two stories, not only illustrates the differences between what he called dramatic theatre and his own epic theatre, but also proves that, as Jan Needle and Peter Thomson put it, "he was as capable as the next dramatist of interweaving elements to make up a homogeneous whole."⁹ Unlike the

⁸ Bertolt Brecht, "Notes on *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*", *Tulane Drama Review*, 12 (1967), p.95

⁹ Jan Needle and Peter Thomson, *Brecht*, p.206

uncharacteristically "integrated" anecdote of Pete the Pipe and Yvette in *Mother Courage and Her Children*, the two stories in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* take place at the same point, in the same country and during the same period of history. "Many other dramatists would not only have interwoven the two, but interwoven also the lives of Azdak and Grusha," argue Jan Needle and Peter Thomson. "That Brecht chose not to is one of the reasons why the play is a masterpiece."¹⁰

The Caucasian Chalk Circle is also one of Brecht's most mature plays and produces a desirable reconciliation of the contradiction between reason and emotion. As discussed in Chapter I, Brecht's concept of empathy or emotion evolved from his early tendency to reject the emotional side of human nature in favour of reason, to his acknowledgement of the need to clarify emotions, until, under the influence of Mei Lanfang's acting, his final effort to achieve a balance between such contradictions as reason and emotion, demonstration and experience. Such a balance is achieved in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* through the author's effective use of the singer whose "chilly and unemotional way of singing," as Brecht himself explains, "makes evident the terror of a period in which motherly instincts can become a suicidal weakness."¹¹

Some critics, however, remain unconvinced of the balance of the conflict between emotion and reason in the play.¹² In the final scene where, in the test of the chalk circle during which the child must be pulled out in different directions, Grusha lets it go so as not to hurt it, Martin Esslin asserts that "it is emotion not reason that wins the battle." Therefore, he believes that "the emotional side" of the character, which appears "in an increasingly sympathetic light," is a "separate and contradictory aspect of the same personality" as against reason.¹³

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre", in *Brecht on Theatre*, p.203

¹² For example, Jan Needle and Peter Thomson think that Brecht misunderstood the effect of his own writing, for, to them, the "beauty" of the scene of saving the child has a "stunning emotional effect" which makes "the response he describes simply impossible." See Jan Needle and Peter Thomson, *Brecht*, p.211

¹³ Martin Esslin, *Brecht: A Choice of Evils*, pp.232-233

These critics seem to ignore the fact that Brecht by no means chose to eliminate emotional identification with his character. On the other hand, they also appear to overlook the function of the singer in the play, who, being the only stage figure participating in the frame play of the valley dispute in the Prologue (as character) and the two Grusha and Azdak playlets inside it, the chalk-circle nucleus (as narrator and commentator), mediates between the stage and the audience, reminding them that what takes place on the stage is the exemplary reality of a performance instead of illusionistic slices of life. Knowing the motives and thoughts of all characters, he manipulates time and space at his will. (The action of each scene starts at an appropriate gesture he makes.) His comments suggest to the audience the most economical attitude proper to the play and its unified understanding. As one critic points out,

In this play there is no need for the more obvious forms of the Brechtian alienation effect because the epic nature of the singer's tale makes it impossible for the intoxicating illusion of reality ever to take hold; hence there is less need for interruptions to the action to jolt the audience out of its normal tendency towards empathy.¹⁴

The use of the singer as an effective device is self-evident in that throughout the whole play he not only narrates in the third person and past tense, but also has two "musicians" who function as his assistants, answering the questions that he asks on behalf of the audience. Such a device ensures that the social dynamic of Grusha's story does not rely on inward-looking psychologically detailed explanations for the motive or outcome. Everything is communicated outwardly, through what happens when it happens rather than through states of mind and soul. As the children belong to those who care for them and see to it that they thrive, the audience correspondingly know to whom the valley will go. Reason, common sense and social utility win the day. Hence a resolution of the conflict between reason and emotion.

¹⁴ J. M. Ritchie, *Brecht: Der Kaukasische Kreidekreis* (London: Edward Arnold, 1976), pp.49-50

Among many features of the play,¹⁵ the temporal progression of two seemingly unrelated stories underlined with a dual theme of goodness and self-interest and the alienating device of singer as actor/narrator or commentator in a desirable solution of the conflict between reason and emotion seem to be the two major aspects which show *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* as one of Brecht's best plays. However, as we shall see, the point here is not so much to evaluate the technical virtuosity that Brecht displays as an argument henceforth that it was Brecht's response to Chinese drama that helped him achieve an exemplary harmony between form and content in this work.

John Fuegi sums up the importance of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* as the following:

The play employs many of the devices called for in Brecht's early epic theory, namely, fragmentary action, extensive use of narrative or "third person exposition," the use of songs, and finally the sheer breadth and depth of the materials treated within the play. Further, it is Brecht's production of this particular play which shares the distinction with *Mother Courage* of having established the post-exile Brecht as a playwright/director of international renown. Lastly, it is worth remembering that the *Chalk Circle* was the last of his own plays that Brecht was to direct completely, before his death in 1956. For these reasons it might be argued that the text of the *Chalk Circle* and Brecht's production of that text tells us perhaps more about the style of the mature Brecht and Brecht's practical, working relationship to his early theory than any other play we might choose to examine.¹⁶

What John Fuegi forgets to mention here is Brecht's indebtedness to Chinese theatre as a model not only for the plot structure, but also to particular Chinese stage devices,

¹⁵ Leonard Cabell Pronko also suggests "the symphony of stylized moment" in performance as part of the technical virtuosity which contributes to the play as Brecht's best. "The symphony of stylized moment" includes the procession of the caricatured noble personages, the flight of the governor's wife, Grusha's night vigil over the child, and so on. See Leonard Cabell Pronko, *Theatre East and West*, p.62

¹⁶ John Fuegi, "The Caucasian Chalk Circle in Performance", *Brecht Heute · Brecht Today*, 1 (1971), 137-149 (p.138)

such as the suggestive décor or scenery,¹⁷ the use of masks, and the gong music,¹⁸ etc., which combine to imbue *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* with an unmistakable Chinese colour.

As Malcolm Read notes, "Surprisingly little attention has been given to the sources of Brecht's play and it is not appreciated that an earlier version of the Chalk Circle by Klabund had been a considerable and unqualified theatrical success in Germany."¹⁹ Such criticism can be applied to critics who either chose not to go into details about this subject or looked for other sources which they felt could be analogous to Brecht's play. Martin Esslin, for example, only mentions it as "based on the old Chinese play, *The Circle of Chalk* [sic], which was successfully adapted by Klabund in Germany in 1920s" without elaborating upon it.²⁰ John Willett believes that "the plot and some of the language are Biblical, the 'Song of Chaos' Egyptian; the

¹⁷ Michael Marland mentions that stylized Chinese paintings, such as a mountain valley, on a large white cloth, were used in the chasing scene as the backdrop of the turntable. It was unfurled across the centre of the stage to cut off the rear half of the stage, producing an effect that was spacious, continuously active, and often very beautiful. See Bertolt Brecht, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, ed. by Michael Marland; trans. by Eric Bentley (London: Methuen, 1967), p.129

¹⁸ Renata Berg-Pam discusses Brecht's use of masks, appreciated by a group of Chinese students watching the play, as a means of solving the technical problem of how to represent one hundred and fifty characters in the play. As to the use of music played on the gong, she assumes that Brecht "hoped to provide something like a Chinese atmosphere for the play." See Renata Berg-Pam, *Bertolt Brecht and China*, pp.201-204

¹⁹ Malcolm Read, "Brecht, Klabund and the Chalk Circle", *Modern Languages*, 53 (1972), 28-32 (p.28)

Since his short essay was written in the early 1970s, Malcolm Read was unable to include some forthcoming major writings also dealing with the same subject, however still inadequately, namely, Antony Tatlow's *The Mask of Evil* (1977) and Renata Berg-Pam's *Bertolt Brecht and China* (1979). Tatlow, in his preoccupation with the Japanese influence upon Brecht, largely side-steps Klabund and dismisses the formal structure of Chinese source as less important than the thematic structure, a point which he relates to ancient Chinese philosophy (p.287; p.348). Renata Berg-Pam only gives passing attention to a comparison of Brecht's play with Chinese theatre or Klabund by incorporates it in Chapter VII "More 'Chinese' Plays" (pp.179-218), as she "decided to treat the matter biographically and chronologically" (p.xi).

²⁰ Martin Esslin, *Brecht: A Choice of Evils*, p.277

technique of narration and comment Japanese; the construction cinematic; [...] the wedding scene a reflection of the Marx brothers' *A Night at the Opera*."²¹

John Willett's list, which again brings us back to the same point about the variety of sources of influences to which Brecht was receptive throughout his whole dramatic career, points out, above all, the plot structure of the play as an echo of, or parallel to, the Bible. Keith Dickson, too, notes that Brecht was inspired by "two versions of a legend whose dominant theme is justice," namely, Klabund's free adaptation of Li Xingdao's thirteenth-century *The Tale of the Chalk Circle*, and the basically similar biblical version of the Judgement of Solomon (I Kings, 3:16-28)²²

Brecht's use of the test of the chalk circle to resolve the issue of motherhood can be equated with the judgement of King Solomon. The point of comparison lies in the perspicacity of a judge who must interpret the observation that a woman is unwilling to hurt a child. In the Bible, two harlots were brought before Solomon, each claiming to be the mother of the same child. Unable to decide which claimant was the real mother in the first place, Solomon relied on the test of threatening to cut the child into two halves with his sword and letting each of the two have one half. While the real mother relented, the false mother decided to go ahead since she was determined that neither of them should have the child. The false mother, who shared the same roof with the real mother, had lost her own child. Out of envy she was ready to see the other child slaughtered. The motive of the "false" though biological mother in Brecht's test of the chalk circle is more practical. Out of considerations of economic advantage, the Governor's wife wants back the child whom she abandoned when she ran for her life during the riot. By taking back the child, she could inherit all the family properties left by the late Governor. She is determined to pull it out of the circle, not caring whether she might hurt it or not. Thus the child here becomes a symbol of inheritance whereas it is in the Bible an object of envy. The Judgement of

²¹ John Willett, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht*, p.124

²² Keith A. Dickson, *Towards Utopia: A Study of Brecht* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), p.193

Solomon and the test of the chalk circle are an embodiment of old wisdom shared by human beings, and are counterparts to each other. As Brecht says,

The Chalk Circle of the ancient Chinese [...] play as well as its biblical counterpart, Solomon's trial by the sword, remain valuable, [...] as trials of motherhood even though motherhood is now defined in sociological rather than biological terms.²³

Brecht's remark seems to be an acknowledgement of his debt to the Chinese source in his version of the chalk circle story where the establishment of motherhood transcends the biological and is re-defined in terms of sociological implications. John Willett, however, argues that Brecht's play is "pseudo-Chinese," which "can be traced back to the *Kreidekreis*" by Klabund.²⁴ Hereby, the "pseudo-Chineseness" of Brecht's play and its relations with Chinese drama vis-à-vis Klabund becomes an important point to be clarified in our comparison. We shall first take a look at the original Chinese play and how it was adapted by Klabund.

The Tale of the Chalk Circle, written by Li Xingdao, a minor Chinese Yuan playwright of the thirteenth century, under the full title of *Judge Pao's Witty Use of the Chalk Circle* (*Bao Daizhi Zhizhuan Hui Lan Ji*, or simply, *Hui Lan Ji*), is a typical example of the Trial Plays which flourished in China during the late Yuan Dynasty (1271-1386) and early Ming Dynasty, and which are still very popular items of the traditional drama. The Trial Plays, as the very name denotes, refer to those which end with a trial scene, a reinstatement of the principle of social justice which has been previously disregarded by evil men. In Li's story, the object of the court case is the inheritance which is bound to the child. Haitang, who has been forced to work in an infamous establishment, has borne an heir to Mr Ma, a rich man who bought her out of the profession and married her as a second wife (by tradition considered socially inferior). Because of this, the infertile first wife Mrs Ma finds her prime position in

²³ Quoted from Renata Berg-Pam, *Bertolt Brecht and China*, pp.200-201

²⁴ John Willett, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht*, pp.123-124

the family endangered. In order to seize the whole family fortune and enjoy life with her secret lover Mayor Zhao, Mrs Ma poisons her husband, accuses Haitang of the murder, and claims the child as her own. They bribe Governor Su Shun to leave the case to Zhao at the local magistrate court where Haitang is sentenced to death after being tortured into confessing. Haitang is escorted to the high court in the capital city to be re-tried and executed (a customary practice in ancient China). Mrs Ma pays the escorts to kill Haitang on the way, who escapes by chance. The incorruptible Judge Pao at the high court becomes suspicious of the case and decides to settle maternity by the chalk circle test: the child is placed inside a circle, the two claimants are ordered to pull him out. Haitang lets go because she cannot bear to hurt her son. Hence the truth. The child and the estate are adjudicated to Haitang. Mrs Ma and her lover are arrested and receive proper punishment.

Little is known of this Chinese Yuan Dynasty dramatist Li Xingdao except that he is the author of the *Hui Lan Ji* or *The Tale of the Chalk Circle* which was first included (as number 64) in a seventeenth-century anthology of Yuan dramas (called *Yuanqu Xuan* or *Collected Plays of Yuan Dynasty*).²⁵ Perhaps due to its analogy with the Judgement of Solomon and its strong social appeal of oppressed lower class of women, it was seized upon by Stanislas Julien, a professor of Chinese language at the Collège de France and an outstanding translator of classical Chinese novels and plays, who rendered it into French and published it in 1832.²⁶

²⁵ It was republished [n. ed.], in ten volumes, in 1985, by Classical Books (Guji Chubanshe), Beijing. For a synopsis and analysis of the play, see Shen Hongxing, "The Tale of the Chalk Circle" ("Hui Lan Ji"), in *Classical Chinese Drama (Zhongguo Gudian Mingju Jianshang Cidian)*, ed. by Xu Peijun and Fan Mingsheng (Shanghai: Classical Books, 1990), pp.123-126

²⁶ The French title is *Hoei-Lan-Ki, ou L'Histoire du Cercle de Craie* (London: Oriental Society, 1832). Julien substituted the original "lime" with "chalk," expurgated several indecent passages about Mrs Ma and her lover Mayor Zhao, and supplied copious notes, mostly of a philosophical nature. Two years later, he also produced a complete version of *The Orphan of Zhao*, restoring the missing songs and verses in Father Prémare's translation (Paris, 1735). His effort in translating Chinese drama can be regarded as a continuation of the eighteenth-century "chinoiserie" in Europe. Renata Berg-Pam does not seem to offer any sound reason why the Chinese *Chalk Circle* became known to the West when she says

Der Kreidekreis (1925) is largely a free adaptation by Klabund, whose real name was Alfred Henschke, based on Wollheim da Fonseca's 1876 free adaptation of Stanislas Julien's translation. Yet it still follows the basic plot of the Chinese Yuan play, and even the names of the characters like Mrs Ma and Haitang remain unchanged. On top of this, a theme of love is interwoven with the main plot. As a result, what was an original Chinese trial play becomes a Western tragic-comedy which describes the victory of love and wisdom over social vices. The main story of judging a case by means of a chalk circle, nevertheless, still occupies a prominent position in the adapted five-act play, and some of the Chinese theatre devices such as self-introduction were still retained.

In Klabund's version, Haitang is forced into the service of Tong, the proprietor of a tea-house of ill-repute, due to her father's bankruptcy and subsequent suicide. Pao, a vagabond prince, meets her there and falls in love with her, but she becomes Ma's second wife when the latter buys her out of the tea-house and promises to provide financial support for her mother. She bears him a son and Ma intends to promote her to first wife. This is brought to a premature end by the jealous Madame Ma (and her secret lover), who, after murdering Ma, accuses Haitang of the crime and contests her claim to the child. The judge and witnesses are bribed, but trial and final judgement are stopped when there comes the news of a new emperor who orders all sentences to be suspended pending re-trial by himself. Haitang is transported to the capital city, where the retrial is held before Pao who uses the test of the chalk circle. When the true mother is finally decided, Pao suddenly confesses that he is the father

that it is "in part due to the simple accident that a scholar decided to seize on this play rather than another for translation into a western language." See Renata Berg-Pam, *Bertolt Brecht and China*, p.193

J. M. Ritchie's explanation seems partially valid. In terms of the Yuan drama which generally falls into four types: historical, forensic, taoistic, and erotic, he suggests that "on the whole the forensic or courtroom dramas were the ones which became best known in the West, for the early translators of Chinese drama, who were missionaries, did not approve of the 'practical' Chinese treatment of sex." See J. M. Ritchie, *Brecht: Der Kaukasische Kreidekreis*, p.10

of the child, having entered Haitang's bedchamber on the night of their first meeting. He takes back his own son and marries Haitang.

The differences between the original Chinese story and Klabund's version are apparent, for the latter shows more affinities with the Romantic tradition of the fairy-tale as seen in the theme of love between the prince and the common girl, the contrast between good and evil and the final triumph of the former.

As J. M. Ritchie points out,

Klabund had certainly been somewhat over-lavish with the chinoiserie in his play. In his eagerness to make it as Chinese as possible he had made his play forensic, erotic and taoistic and in addition it simply bristled with spheres, magic Tao rings, circles in the air, chalk circles, etc.²⁷

Apart from the added love story, Klabund's overuse of the chalk circle as a symbol is evident. In *Der Kreidekreis* there are chalk circles everywhere. In the first act it is represented as the mirror of the fate of the two lovers and their love. In Act II it becomes an oracle, a mystery which Haitang cannot interpret when she draws a circle on the ground in order to decide whether her husband (who, in Klabund's version, was a tax-collector and was responsible for her father's death) is to be killed. In Act III it is used in the first corrupt trial as if it were a regular formality of the Chinese courts.

Alfred Forke, a famous sinologist, is said to have been outraged by Klabund's "shameless misrepresentation" of the Chinese play.²⁸ Subsequently, he worked on his own version, with an accurate translation of the original, omitting all the indecent passages and restoring Haitang's songs which were left out in Klabund's adaptation.²⁹

²⁷ J. N. Ritchie, *Brecht: Der Kaukasische Kreidekreis*, p.12

²⁸ See Antony Tatlow, *The Mask of Evil*, p.293

²⁹ Li Hsing-tao [sic], *Der Kreidekreis*, trans. by Alfred Forke (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1926). This edition contains one of the few commentaries showing an understanding of the social significance of the original play.

However, despite all the apparent pseudo-Chineseness, Klabund's *Der Kreidekreis*, first produced by Max Reinhardt in October, 1925, was an enormous success.³⁰

Brecht was working as dramaturg at Reinhardt's complex of Berlin theatre around the mid-1920s.³¹ He attended the performance of Klabund's play and must have been fully aware of its enormous commercial success, to which he made a quick response with an "interlude for the foyer", *The Elephant Calf*, in *A Man's a Man* (1924-1926), first produced on 25 September, 1926. Brecht's surrealistic insertion reads like a parody of Klabund's *Der Kreidekreis*, whose over-lavish use of the chalk circle was ridiculed by a similar device of a crucial test. Jackie Pall, the baby elephant, who is played by the same actor who plays Galy Gay, with other British Tommies acting the parts of mother, the moon and banana tree, is forced to tie a piece of rope around his mother's neck and pull her out of a circle drawn on the ground so as to prove whether he is her own child or not. The child or baby elephant turns out to be neither the son nor the daughter of the mother, whom he or she has murdered anyway. So the whole courtroom situation is turned upside down, the mother is pulled out of the circle, the legitimacy problem is ridiculed and the original subtitle upheld: "You can prove anything."

Brecht's different viewpoint regarding the legitimacy problem addressed by society's legal system suggests that whatever kind of inspiration he might have received from Klabund's rendering of the old Chinese legend, he was more interested

³⁰ J. M. Ritchie notes that Klabund's play was an immediate and international success in that one of the two English translations based on his version was used for a spectacular production in London in 1931 starring Anna May Wong and Laurence Olivier, and Piscator kept it constantly in his repertoire at his Studio Theatre in America. See J. M. Ritchie, *Brecht: Der Kaukasische Kreidekreis*, pp.11-12

Malcolm Read also notes that Klabund's adaptation was the most widely translated work of its day, "being performed in almost every European country," though it was not until the appearance of Brecht's play that it again aroused public interest. See Malcolm Read, "Brecht, Klabund and the Chalk Circle", *Modern Languages*, 53 (1972), p.30

Renata Berg-Pam notes that "Klabund's play is still very popular and to this day a regular item in the German theatre." See Renata Berg-Pam, *Bertolt Brecht and China*, p.196

³¹ See John Willett, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht*, pp.145-146

in its trial motif than its technical and dramatic devices which, as some critics argue, also attracted him.³²

The forensic device or the courtroom trial seems to have held a fascination for Brecht, and is often the culminating scene of his dramas. The trial motif of the Chinese Yuan drama appears to have impressed him with its clear social bias, its explicit theme of life-and-death struggle between good and evil wherein the good and innocent are pitted against the pernicious forces of society. A poetic or social justice is indispensable. A moral lesson must be taught and upheld.

In *The Exception and the Rule* (1930), for example, the trial motif which he adopted for his play is applied to a plot that leads an audience to reject an unjust socially corrupt judgement, instead of accepting the necessity of an execution no matter how regrettable it might be. Apart from some of the obvious presentational features like the episodic structure, songs sung to the audience, the invariably haughty manner of the rich or the imperious behaviour of the judge on the stage, and the like, which are all reminiscent of those in Chinese theatre, what is more interesting about the play is that Brecht transformed his plot of trial almost out of all recognition from the Chinese version from which it had developed. The question of social justice is presented in provocative dialectical reversal. While in Chinese drama an individual is always shown as having an innate right to justice and challenges his fate if it contravenes the concepts of social justice, in *The Exception and the Rule* only injustice prevails. Its trial scene, which Brecht modelled upon Chinese trial drama and adopted for many of his plays, presents a bourgeois court which acquits the merchant who had allegedly good reasons to kill his heavily exploited servant after the latter's act of apparently unexpected generosity. Such a reversed thematic plot of a jury which is supposed to announce not guilty a "murderer" victimized by heavy class

³² Renata Berg-Pam argues that Klabund's play had dramaturgical appeal to Brecht on account of its abundant instances of self-introduction and song interpolation. See Renata Berg-Pam, "Mixing Old and New Wisdom: The Chinese Source of Brecht's *Kaukasische Kreidekreis* and Other Works", *German Quarterly*, 47 (1975), 204-228 (p.215)

exploitation and yet subjected to exceptional and entirely unexpected generosity is an example of Brecht's use of borrowed plots in his specific social context. A moral lesson is taught and upheld all the same, in accordance with the playwright's idea of theatre for instruction.

One of Brecht's most important works where the Chinese trial scene is also skilfully adopted is his play *The Good Person of Szechuan*. The typical Confucian courtesy displayed by Shen Te, a virtuous prostitute, is cruelly taken advantage of by a large group of greedy, lazy people so that she is forced through self-defence into retaliation. She has to change, to re-adjust herself in an environment which changes to crush her, and the gods' moral demands go contradictory against the realities of life. Most significant of all is the final trial scene, where Shui Ta, Shen Te herself disguised as her own cousin, is wrongly accused of murder, arraigned before a court and finally acquitted by Heavenly judges, the ultimate guarantors of Chinese justice. Brecht reverses the conclusion. The judges, who are actually the gods in the play, are just as much on trial as the unfortunate Shen Te, as their morality is insufficient in a particular social milieu like Shen Te's.

In his conclusion about Brecht's response to Chinese theatre as a model, Antony Tatlow claims that one of the most important reasons why Chinese theatre appealed to the playwright was the nature of Chinese plot. Brecht "turned to Chinese theatre for the plot structure of what is probably his best play," because the plots of Chinese drama "depended upon assumptions about man and society which he admired."³³

According to John Willett and Ralph Manheim, in October, 1943, upon hearing from Luise Rainer that she was particularly fond of playing the role of the heroine in Klabund's *Der Kreidekreis*, Brecht said that he had been thinking of

³³ Antony Tatlow, *The Mask of Evil*, p.290

writing a play on the same theme for so many years, and he even told her that he had suggested it to Klabund himself long before.³⁴

When he went into exile in Denmark in 1936, Brecht worked on two sketches respectively, *The Odense Chalk Circle* and *The Chalk Circle*, the first one being very brief, and the second being relatively clear, with four divided sections and all the characters using Chinese names. Some original transcripts of stage conversations show that Brecht adopted the same name of Haitang for the heroine in his forthcoming play³⁵. As to his short story "The Augsburg Chalk Circle" (1941), the plot structure bears close similarities with that in the final playtext, only with the setting being his hometown during the Thirty Years War. Thus, when he was asked to write a play about the chalk circle for Broadway in 1944, he had already experimented with characters as well as plot structure.

Brecht claimed that he went back to the Chinese source in writing his play.³⁶ There were a few versions of the Chinese story available at the time, those respectively by Stanislas Julien, Alfred Forke, and Wollheim da Fonseca, and also the one by Ethel Van Der Veer.³⁷ Brecht could have referred to any of these versions. Looking in terms of "a reliable academic version of the text with commentary," J. M. Ritchie suggests that Brecht could have consulted the famous sinologist Alfred

³⁴ John Willett and Ralph Manheim relate that a New York backer called Jules Leventhal, who was anxious to bring Luise Rainer to Broadway in a suitable work, agreed to pay Brecht to write a story on the chalk circle, upon suggestions made by Luise Rainer herself. See Bertolt Brecht, *Collected Plays*, VII, p.xvi

James K. Lyon offers an elaborate account about how Luise Rainer, sponsored by Jules Leventhal, commissioned Brecht to write a play on the chalk circle for her to perform the main character in a Broadway production, and how she never appeared in the role due to personal disagreement with Brecht. See James K. Lyon, *Brecht in America*, pp.123-129

³⁵ See Bertolt Brecht, *Collected Plays*, VII, pp.310-312

³⁶ See J. M. Ritchie, *Brecht: Der Kaukasische Kreidekreis*, p.9

³⁷ See notes 26 & 29 above. Wollheim da Fonseca's translation *Hoei-Lan-Ki* was published Meiner (Leipzig) in 1876; Ethel Van Der Veer's translation, *The Chalk Circle*, appeared in the anthology *World Drama: Ancient Greece, Rome, India, China, Japan, Medieval Europe, and England* (ed. by Barrett H. Clark), which was published in New York by Dutton in 1933.

Forke's translation (and there is even a possibility that he went for the Chinese original, as he had a reputation in working with collaborators and translators).³⁸ However, what particular version of the translations or adaptations Brecht relied on is of secondary importance here, for what concerns us more is how he transported the Chinese model. Brecht's ingenious rewrite, in terms of both plot structure and formal structure, bears closer correspondence to the Chinese model than one might imagine.

In his transportation of the original Chinese story, the main woman character is treated in a slightly different fashion. The Governor's wife flees the city in such a panic that she does not even think of taking her own baby son with her. Her servant girl Grusha, out of sympathy and an in-born maternal love for the child, saves him, risks her life and overcomes all difficulties, even at the cost of her former engagement to a good soldier. As human beings are born to be living entities in society, it is only in actual social life that they can display their true nature. Grusha, as an ordinary woman of the labouring class, retains her virtuous nature throughout the hard times that she shares with the child.

As a progressive playwright in the old feudal society of China, Li Xingdao creates a vivid image of a woman character in his play. Yet due to the limitations of his time and milieu, he could not go beyond the image of a poor, suffering Haitang whose fate has to depend on a wise judge to criticize the whole feudal system which is actually the root cause of the sufferings of lower class women. This is why he set the plot in the previous Song Dynasty where the corruption of justice could be corrected by the historic figure of Judge Pao. Brecht also set the plot in a previous period, but modernized it in the Prologue by using it as a means to solve a contemporary problem. Armed with fundamental Marxist ideas concerning the masses as the basic power to reform society, he creates a Grusha who displays not only maternal love and great tenacity, but also the courage to challenge the legal

³⁸ J. M. Ritchie, *Brecht: Der Kaukasische Kreidekreis*, pp.10-11

system in order to keep a child who was originally not her own. The image of Grusha represents his ideal of social cherishing on a large scale.

In both the Chinese play and Brecht's work, it is the town hall or court-room that serves as the location for dramatic conflicts. In the Yuan play the vices of ancient Chinese officialdom are fully exposed. Scene 2 is a good example, where the playwright creates a vivid image of a venal government official, Governor Su Shun, who, as he says himself in his (self-introduction) speeches, is an important official of the ruling class but does not have the faintest idea about the law, and who always processes legal cases in terms of how much silver people pay to bribe him. In the particular case of Mr Ma's murder, he simply lets Mayor Zhao, the lover and accomplice, deal with it, hence Haitang is wrongly imprisoned. Even if the playwright does not elaborate upon how Mayor Zhao bribes Governor Su in order to directly deal with the case himself, he exposes the evil deeds of corrupt officials who act in collusion with each other to ravage innocent people.

Brecht seems to have been affected by this particular thematic aspect of the Yuan play which execrates corrupt officialdom. This can be shown by the whole process of his working out the plot for his version of the play. In his 1938 sketches for *The Odense Chalk Circle*, the Governor is a decrepit, muddle-headed person who does not have any knowledge about the law. In his outline for the play entitled *The Chalk Circle*, the judge has a Chinese name Schao-fan. During the revolt, he gives shelter to a person of unknown identity who is actually the runaway Governor. When the Governor is reinstated after the revolt, he is appointed as judge. However, he turns out to be a judge who is always drunk in the court-room, and the judgements he makes often depend on whatever is said by the court inspector. He accepts bribes and bribes eye-witnesses as well to give false testimony so that he can conclude the case quickly. What is more ridiculous, he even woos a woman eyewitness in the court-room during a case. This character is analogous with Mayor Zhao in the Chinese Yuan play who, as a government official, only cares about good wine and other people's wives.

To Brecht, however, it was unrealistic to hope for an impartial judge under a partial legislative system. Unlike both Li Xingdao and Klabund who believed in perfect justice demonstrated either by Judge Pao in the name of the Emperor or by Pao who turned out to be the Emperor, Brecht did not choose to portray an ideal, honest and upright judge. On the contrary, he presents Azdak, a drunk hero in a turbulent world, whose aloof and also unrestrained character makes him an estranged person in everybody's eyes. To the revolting Ironshirt soldiers, he is a noisy, pretentious rascal; to the fat Prince, he is just like one of his rough carpet weavers; and the moment the Governor's wife sees him, she declares that she does not like this man. Even Grusha, at one time, misunderstands him as an ignorant drunkard. In a word, he is not a simplified image of the ideal, honest and upright judge familiar in the Chinese trial plays, although he cannot be likened to venal officials, like Su Shun and Mayor Zhao in the Yuan play, or Schao-fan in Brecht's sketches who are all portrayed as savage oppressors of common people. As an ordinary village recorder in turbulent times, Azdak is so encouraged by what he believes to be a new age brought about by the revolt that he sings a hymn to it before the Ironshirts about the injustice in the country. Upon sensing the wrong tune in the latter's response, he corrects his language immediately. His smartness amuses the soldiers, who appoint him judge instead of hanging him. During the two years of sitting in the judge's chair, he openly accepts bribes and tries every case in his peculiar fashion. He even moves his chair into a tavern where he drinks and entertains people with pitchers of wine while trying cases. However, alcoholic as he is, he is never muddle-headed. In every case he tries, it is always the weak, the poor that he lets win. He makes the rich suffer and pay for every lawsuit. It is through the farcical performance of such a character that Brecht unites the two sub-plots of his play and leads to the final part of the test of the chalk circle. Thus, unlike Klabund's romantic Prince, Azdak corresponds more to the figure of Judge Pao, although Brecht mixes his characterization with two judges of the original plot, the good judge Pao and the bad judge Su Shun.

The chalk circle is the axis of the plot structure of both Chinese Yuan play and Brecht's work. As compared with its parallel trial in the Old Testament, the test of the chalk circle has more social meanings in that the final judgement to return the child to his rightful mother secures financial stability under the feudalistic legislation which decrees that only sons can inherit wealth and property left by the father.

The result of the legal proceedings in Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, however, is different from that in both Chinese story and biblical legend. Azdak's judgements turn the normal methods of justice upside down. The child goes back to his adoptive-mother who saved his life, took good care of him and brought him up despite all the risks and hardships. Brecht, by inventing this new ending, brings new life to the ancient story and endows the play with more social meanings in the contemporary world. The treacherous behaviour of the Governor's wife, a representative of the greedy ruling class, who pays more attention to money than to basic human feelings, stands in contrast to the noble deeds of Grusha. The selfish wife of the late Governor wants her child only because she wants the right to handle the huge family properties bequeathed by her husband. On the other hand, out of the motherly love she has shown the child she saved as a little baby, Grusha wants to keep him as much as a mother wants to be with her son. The two mothers are told clearly from each other through Azdak's witty use of the chalk circle. Before he leaves his judge's chair for good, Azdak announces the return of the child to the adoptive-mother instead of his real mother. The message is that the evil ones, whose basic human nature has been distorted by changing circumstances, should be punished in order to reward the good who always display great endurance through hardship.

Projecting the significance of study on the plot structure of Brecht's play, Antony Tatlow argues:

Brecht responded to certain forms of episodic structure; after indicating these connections, there is really nothing more to say. The relationship to plot structure, however, is a different matter, as is the

consideration of formal structure if we relate it to plot structure. Discussing Brecht's relationship to the Chinese theatre, critics have concentrated on the superficial formal structure, whereas it is the plot structure which is more important.³⁹

By "plot structure" Tatlow means the thematic structure, or simply, theme, which he believes to be more important than the formal or dramatic structure. Indeed, one of the characteristic features of the original Chinese version seems to be its thematic structure, its strong social connotation. As a typical example of the Trial Plays which began to flourish during the late Yuan Dynasty, the Chinese *Chalk Circle*, like so many other trial plays which end with a resolution of justice, expresses the strong wish of the common people to overcome evil forces in society by having an upright judge. Ideas like this conformed to those of the idealistic Brecht who was dissatisfied with the corrupt contemporary bourgeois society.

Having said that, however, does not mean that I entirely agree with Tatlow's assertion that it is of more importance to study the plot structure of Brecht's play, for equally important is the issue of theatre form. This is an important aspect of his relations with Chinese theatre when we study how he incorporated Chinese dramatic content into his epic theatre. Antony Tatlow's idea of the "formal structure" of Brecht's plays is, therefore, an unneglectable factor in a comparative study of the playwright's relations with Chinese theatre, and the characteristic features of the formal structure of the plays which served as models for his theatre are more than mere "superficial" matter as Tatlow believes.

Brecht used certain Chinese structures out of extensive aesthetic interests which he shared with Chinese dramatists. As has been discussed in the previous chapter, the classical Chinese theatre and Brecht's epic theatre come together in a common open and diffuse dramatic structure which depends very much on narratives proceeding through a series of scenes of individually complete and rounded actions.

³⁹ Antony Tatlow, *The Mask of Evil*, p.287

The Caucasian Chalk Circle bears a striking feature of fluidity in changing the settings. Scene 2 "The flight into the northern mountains", for example, sees at least five changes of setting, from Grusha's walking down the country highway with the baby on her back, to a peasant's cottage where she buys milk for the child, back on the highway again, then stopping at a farm house, further to a half-frozen stream where she gets water for the child, and finally to the half-broken bridge on the glacier which she courageously crosses to shake off the pursuing Ironshirts. All these changes take place on the same stage within a single scene throughout the progressive process of the dramatic actions between the heroine and other dramatic persons.

In terms of settings changing progressively through dramatic action, traditional Chinese drama shows even more flexibility. One of the common devices is the frequently used entry-exit technique which, as has been mentioned earlier, facilitates the change of setting. For example, in scene 1 of *Maid Tou* (*Dou-e Yuan*, written by Guan Hanqing, the most prominent of all the Chinese Yuan dramatists, approximately in the second half of the thirteenth century) when Doctor Sai Luyi appears, the stage represents his herbal medicine shop; when Granny Chai shows up, it changes into a deserted village outside the city through the few steps she walks and the few words she exchanges with the doctor. Then it becomes their home when she and the Zhang father and son leave and Maid Tou enters. In terms of time, the play spans sixteen years, from Maid Tou at the age of seven to the correction of the colossal wrong imposed on her after her death. The traditional Chinese theatre's normal free practice to elaborate upon major actions and cut short on minor ones is carried out in this particular play, which shows that Chinese theatre does not require a strict agreement between the time spent in carrying out the actions and the time spent in representing or imitating them on the stage. The intermittently changing time and place combine to form scenes of actions as required by the formal structure of Chinese drama.

In *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, there is an interesting parallel with the traditional practice of Chinese drama. In scene 2, Grusha is presented as running

along the country highway, passing cottages, farms, and streams, all the way to the bridge over the glacier, which presumably takes altogether twenty-two days. Yet on the stage, all these actions are completed within a short time in a single scene. Other examples include scene 3 "In the northern mountains", where the setting changes four times with a time span of nearly two years, and Part Two scene 1, "The Story of the judge", which also undergoes constant changes of settings with a time running parallel to that in the three scenes in Part One, for a span of two years as well.

One of the devices which Brecht adopted to create the effect of the movement of time was a mechanized, fast-rotating turntable. The round, empty platform, upon which Grusha, with the baby on her back, ran across the glacier to the mountains, rotated, against the changing picture on the backdrop, to show the different locations of the heroine. This helped to expand the limited stage space, and, in combination with the concept of changing time defined by the advancing actions, also helped to arouse a congruous sense of place appropriate to the development of the plot. Although the device employed here seems to suggest Brecht's indebtedness to Piscator, Leonard Cabell Pronko believes that the scene "most clearly suggests a famous Chinese device." "In the hands of a skilful actress," he says, "Grusha's crossing the bridge can become [...] a piece of visual poetry" simply by the movements of the actress as she sways.⁴⁰

Time advances as dramatic actions progress. This may further result in changes of settings. Generally speaking, lapses of time and changes of place in dramatic performances usually occur in between scenes or acts, as designated by either stage directions or speeches. In Brecht's epic theatre, however, transitions of both time and place often occur inside individual scenes, amidst progressive actions. Brecht made extensive use of songs, which serve to explain that both time and place have changed wherever required. In *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, the songs fall mainly into two sorts: those sung by the singer/storyteller or the chorus at the

⁴⁰ Leonard Cabell Pronko, *Theatre East and West*, pp.62-63

beginning or end of a scene or inside it when there is a change of both time and place, and those sung by the characters.

Brecht's singer and chorus sing either when a scene starts (every scene of the play) or when a scene comes to an end (scenes 1 and 3 of Part One and scene 2 of Part Two). Songs are also sung during drastic conflicts or sudden changes of action (scenes 2 and 3 of Part One and scene 1 of Part Two). This recurrent use of songs finds its analogies in the choruses of ancient Greek tragedies. In ancient Greek tragedies, the chorus both dance and sing to console the characters, to express their feelings about the story, to explain the plot or the playwright's viewpoint, and to represent the division of scenes as well. It is the same case with the storyteller and the chorus in Brecht's play who perform more or less similar functions except that they do not dance and sing to console the characters. Nevertheless, fundamental differences still exist between the two. Unlike the chorus in ancient Greek tragedies which, in the normal order of appearance, come on the stage after the prologue which introduces the plot, in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* the singer and the chorus are an indispensable component. They are always there. At the beginning of every scene, songs serve to introduce characters, who and where they are and what the story is about, and whenever it becomes necessary for time to jump forward, the songs by either the singer or the chorus or both fulfil a specific function. They may be used to indicate an absolute transcendence of time and space, as in scene 1 when Grusha watches over the child on her way to escape from the city, or to show suppositional time elapsing when Grusha runs for twenty-two days carrying the child on her back, and to explain that time jumps back and forth in the story about Azdak.

The method which Brecht adopts for transitions of time and place is traditional practice for Chinese dramatists. The opening songs at the beginning of each scene in Brecht's play are similar to the *dingchangshi*, the scene-fixing poems in Chinese theatre. The only difference is that these poems are either sung or recited by the character himself on the Chinese stage instead of being sung by the storyteller or the chorus as in Brecht's play. If Brecht's opening songs can be likened to the Chinese

scene-fixing poems, his closing songs at the end of the scenes can be compared to the *xiachangshi*, the scene-leaving poems in Chinese drama, which are also either sung or recited by the character as he makes his exit. These poems designate time and place, and their changes as well. The frequent appearance and disappearance of characters reflects frequent changes of time and place. In *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, from the end of scene 3 in Part One, what comes next should presumably be a scene where Azdak acts as the judge to try the case in view of both the development of plot and time sequence. The playwright, however, uses flashback and pushes time back to when the play first began, and when scene 1 in Part Two finishes, it is approximately the same time as when scene 3 in Part One ended. Without a proper transition in both time and place between the two parts, the audience might find it incomprehensible. Brecht solves the problem with a "scene-leaving poem" at the end of the previous scene and a "scene-fixing poem" at the beginning of the following scene, which are sung by the storyteller to conclude the preceding story, introduce the story of Azdak and prepare the audience for a change in the storyline.

To sum up, although *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* can be viewed as representing Brecht's Utopian idealism towards the end of the Second World War, and as a continuation of his experimental drama despite being labelled as a "formalist," it was through his response to Chinese drama as a model for his theatre that he succeeded in producing what is perhaps his best play. He did not merely borrow ancient Chinese dramatic themes for their own sake, but transformed them in such a way as to fit them into the whole theoretic framework of his epic theatre for the modern age. It seems that in the process of transplanting Chinese drama into Europe, combining it with folk-tale elements of European tradition, what concerned him most was how old legend from the East could be recreated to instruct a modern Western audience, particularly in a post-war period, with renewed moral content. Hence his reversed courtroom settlement and the dialectical characterizations of both Grusha and Azdak as split personalities. The presentation of such characters is

facilitated through his method of scene division, which, marked by its fluidity of temporal progression, corresponds to that used by traditional Chinese theatre practitioners to construct their plays. If the Chinese way of interlinking self-contained, distinguishably separate episodes which constitute a play was governed by their own non-Aristotelian aesthetics, for example, the traditional way of storytelling or novel writing (novels with rounded chapters which are headed and also ended with a couplet giving the gist of the contents), Brecht responded with the interpolation of songs and choruses which not only ensure the temporal progression of the play by connecting its individual episodes, but also serve as an effective alienating method to reconcile reason and emotion, demonstration and experience. In terms of both content and form in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, we can see how Chinese theatre effected modifications of Brecht's plot structure and formal structure.

Chapter IV The Chinese Reception of Brecht

The relationship between Brecht and China does not only consist in the response the German playwright made to Chinese drama in the first half of the twentieth century. Bilateral cross-cultural exchange took place when, starting from around the middle of the century, Brecht's work began to be introduced into China. Yet due to its particular political and socio-cultural context, the Chinese reception of Brecht was a long and complicated process which took several decades to realize. The early translations of his works, which can be dated back to the 1940s, and stage productions first converged in *Mother Courage and Her Children* directed by Huang Zuolin in 1959, and then after considerable academic activity in the early 1960s, the introduction of Brecht was brought to a halt for more than ten years from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s on account of the Great Cultural Revolution, during which he was condemned alongside his advocates. It was only afterwards, with the success of the production of *Life of Galileo*, that interest in him was revived. The long and retarded progress Brecht went through for recognition in China is a result of China's political and socio-cultural complications, something Brecht himself might never have imagined. The Chinese response to Brecht has had much to do with both ideological and aesthetical changes. Any examination of Brecht's impact upon Chinese theatre practitioners needs to be seen in relation to this.

We should first bear in mind the difference between China's own traditional theatre forms, which are generally called "opera" in conventional Western terminology, and spoken theatre, which was originally imported from the West. The distinction does not merely lie in the different components of their respective audiences, as observed by some Western scholars,¹ nor does it lie in the apparent

¹ Wolfram Schlenker, for example, notes that "the opera audience consists primarily of peasants and of older people in the cities, while the spoken theatre attracts mainly younger and middle-aged people and intellectuals of all ages." He points out what he believes is "most significant" about it when he relates

dissimilarities in their respective acting methods, one consisting of a combination of speech, singing, dancing, conventionalized movement as well as display of marshal arts and acrobatic skills, and the other depending almost exclusively on conversations (accompanied by necessary gestures) between characters. More significantly, what distinguishes Chinese operas (*xiju*) from modern spoken drama in China (*huaju*) is their different emphasis on the social functions of the theatre. While the traditional Chinese theatre mainly seeks to entertain its audience with its synthesized beauty and attractiveness through the actor's perfection of fundamental acting skills, China's modern theatre endeavours to instruct. The traditional theatre forms of China, on the one hand, have remained practically unchanged since their first appearance, with an established repertoire over several hundred years. On the other hand, Chinese spoken drama, ever since its foundation in Japan by a group of dissident Chinese students at the beginning of the twentieth century, has been experimenting with forms of expression, with a range of different dramatic texts produced to suit the different political situations in China. Wolfram Schlenker's comment on the problems of the political plays written and staged shortly after the downfall of the Gang of Four in the late 1970s perhaps also applies to the characteristics of China's modern drama. He says:

Everything was completely adjusted to the real and obvious hatred felt by the appreciative audience: it was more like cabaret than theatre, suitable for that day's use. What characterizes the new plays to a greater or lesser degree is above all the fact that they are simply commodity articles, worn out quickly, in a matter of months. Perhaps this is the real reason for the theatre's productivity. Under such circumstances simple plays can be swiftly produced, and the theatre can react quickly to events and requirements with a diversity of plays.²

that he "hardly ever found anyone who really liked both forms." See Wolfram Schlenker, "Modern Chinese Drama: Characteristics - Problems - Perspectives", *Theatre Research International*, 8 (1983), 220-232 (p.220)

² *ibid*, p.223

However, with regard to the particular circumstances of modern Chinese spoken theatre, it is hardly surprising to see a predominance of plays dealing with current social or political problems. The "ephemeral genre", the critical terminology used by Antony Tatlow,³ only serves to remind us how complicated the political situations in China have always been and how difficult a task modern Chinese dramatists have had in order to best adapt Western-type theatre.

Around the beginning of the twentieth century when the leading members of the European avant-garde were discovering the theatre traditions of the Far East as a potential source of innovation for their own theatre, Chinese theatre practitioners, basically a group of young, radical intellectuals, were looking for new representational techniques, as they were dissatisfied with the "preposterous" style of Chinese operas which they thought did not aim at "a close resemblance to real people and real-life situations."⁴ In 1906, Li Xishuang founded the Spring Willow society in Tokyo where it won initial success with dramatizations of *La Dame aux Camèlias* by Alexander Dumas and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher-Stowe. The second of these two productions is particularly worth mentioning, not only because it was produced in Shanghai the following year, marking the first performance of Western-style spoken drama in China, but also because its theme of revolt against racial oppression appealed strongly to the patriotic feelings of young Chinese at a time when China was torn apart by civil war, and when traditional cultural values were being challenged.

³ By using the "ephemeral genre" which he believes modern Chinese spoken drama falls into, Antony Tatlow refers to the large number of topical plays appearing and forgotten all within a short period of time, as a reflection of the ever changing political situations in China. See Antony Tatlow, "Social Space and Aesthetic Time---East Asian Theatre: Transcultural Challenge", *Theatre Research International*, 8 (1983), p.212

⁴ See Clara Yü Cuadrado, "Cross-Cultural Currents in the Theatre: China and the West", in *China and the West: Comparative Literature Studies*, ed. by William Tay and others (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1984), pp.217-237 (p.231)

The commitment of this new experimental theatre led it to emulate the social dramas of Western playwrights. Numerous theatre societies were founded. Productions of works of Western realists, particularly by Ibsen and Shaw, followed one after another until their names became familiar, and their works frequently quoted.⁵ For example, Hu Shi, who translated *A Doll's House*, wrote of Ibsen:

Ibsen describes the actual relationships within domestic life, and thereby shocks the audience into realizing how dark and rotten the foundations of domestic life really are. He inspires those caught in domesticity to revolution and renovation. This is Ibsenism.⁶

The demand for a theatre which should mirror life in a process of fundamental cultural and social change stamped modern Chinese spoken theatre with the predominant traits of Western realist theatre which the early Chinese theatre practitioners used as models. Realistic in nature, capable of treating contemporary subjects and serving the needs of the ever changing political situations, the new Chinese theatre was to remain like this for many decades to come. At various times, especially when drastic social upheavals or transitions took place, the Chinese audience could see their predicament reflected on stage.⁷ This was not only the case

⁵ Ding Luonan notes that during the early 1920s, more than twelve of Ibsen's works and more than thirteen of Shaw's dramas were translated. Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, *Devil's Disciples*, *People's Enemy*, Shaw's *Widowers' Houses*, *Man and Superman*, *Arms and the Man*, etc., were among the most frequently produced foreign plays throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Other foreign dramatists introduced around the same period included Chekov, Gorky, Strindberg, Galsworthy, Hauptmann, etc. The most influential journals included the *New Youth* (*Xing Qingnian*, started in 1916) and *Drama* (*Xiju*, started in 1919). See Ding Luonan, *Modern Chinese Spoken Theatre Learning from Foreign Theatres: Historical Experiences* (*Zhongguo Huaju Xuexi Waiguo Xiju de Lishi Jingyan*) (Shanghai: Chinese Theatre Press, 1983), pp.9-17

⁶ Quoted from Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Theatre, Own and Foreign: The Intercultural Trend in Contemporary Theatre", in *The Dramatic Touch of Difference*, p.14

⁷ There are many examples of this kind of topical play. Tian Han's *Drop Your Whip* (*Fangxia Nide Bianzi*, 1937) was intended to encourage Chinese people to unite and rise up against the Japanese invasion by depicting the miseries of the refugees from Manchuria when it was invaded on 18 September, 1936. Huang Zuolin's comedy *Promotions* (*Shengguan Tu*, 1946) was a political satire

before the establishment of the People's Republic. Socialist China did not try to change this orientation. Instead, it was strengthened.

As early as 1942, Mao Zedong had pointed out the close relationship between politics and arts in his speech at a forum on literature and arts in Yan'an, the red rural area in North China under the control of the red army. He said:

In the world today all culture, all literature and art belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political lines. There is in fact no such thing as art for art's sake, art that stands above classes or art that is detached from or independent of politics.⁸

In direct co-ordination with the party's cultural policies, Chinese spoken drama endeavours to propagandize and educate. For example, in terms of content, almost all Huang Zuolin's productions in the 1950s and 1960s were politically inclined, depicting current social events. Although reminiscent of Brecht's epic structure, *The Living Newspaper of the Resist-U.S.-and-Assist-Korea Campaign* (*Kangmeiyuanchao Dahuobao*, 1951) was self-evident as the title of the play indicates, *Eight Red Flags Are Fluttering* (*Bamian Hongqi Ying Feng Piao*, 1958) was a propaganda play about the movement of the Great Leap Forward, and *Brave the Current* (*Jiliu Yong Jin*, 1963) had to do with the withdrawal of Russian technical experts following the deterioration of relations between Russia and China in the early 1960s which left China dependent on its own resources for the recovery of the country's economy.

directed against the Kuomintang government who came to harvest the fruit of the victory against the Japanese invaders after having retreated to the southwest of China. As mentioned in the thesis, a large proportion of Huang's productions after the Communist Party came into power in 1949 were in co-ordination with social and political movements in China. For Western scholarship on plays which reflected changing political situations shortly after the end of the Great Cultural Revolution, see Wolfram Schlenker, "Modern Chinese Drama: Characteristics - Problems - Perspective", *Theatre Research International*, 8 (1983), pp.223-236

⁸ Mao Zedong, *Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Arts* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1967), p.25

As the head of the Shanghai People's Arts Theatre under the leadership of the Communist Party since 1951, Huang's political orientation as shown in his works is understandable. As a theatre artist, however, Huang seemed to be more concerned with the obsolete methods of artistic presentation which Chinese spoken drama displayed.⁹ In his eyes, spoken theatre in China had changed little. Its plot structure had been basically that of the Ibsenite realist plays, and its directing and acting methods had been dominated by Stanislavskian principles. This restricted creativity and could be harmful to further development.¹⁰ As early as 1962, Huang Zuolin put forward the idea of integrating the three different systems of Stanislavsky, Brecht and Mei Lanfang, aiming at a new path for development.¹¹ However, his ideas were neglected due to the economic and ideological crisis the country was going through, caused mainly by a series of nation-wide natural disasters and the deterioration of the relationship between China and the Soviet Union, and also due to the imminent ten-year long catastrophe of the Great Cultural Revolution.

Towards the end of the 1970s when China started to shift its attention from ideological struggles to economic reconstruction, Chinese spoken theatre was finally able to experiment with theatre forms, utilizing the indigenous styles of traditional

⁹ Professor Zhang Li points out:

Up till now most accomplished playwrights [in China] still use the traditional European structure which Gustav Freytag called the pyramidal form, rising to and falling from the climax, and which divided a play into four or five acts. Some only divide it into scenes without acts like some works of Tian Han, but the internal structure is much the same as the pyramidal form.

Zhang Li, "Brecht in China", in *Brecht and East Asian Theatre*, pp.18-27 (pp.22-23)

¹⁰ Huang Zuolin says: "The illusionist concept of the fourth wall [...] has been regarded as the only method of theatre performance. [...] Our creativity has been largely restricted." Huang Zuolin, *Talks by a Director (Daoyan de Hua)* (Shanghai: Literature and Arts Press, 1979), p.180. The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Zhaocheng shenghuo huanjue de 'Di si du Qiang' [...] zhi rending shi hua ju de weiyi chuanguo fangfa. [...] Yanzhong de xianzhi liao women de chuanguo zhao."

¹¹ The idea appeared in his speech delivered at the National Symposium of Spoken Drama and Opera Writing in Guangzhou in April, 1962. After being revised, it was published in the *People's Daily (Remin Ribao)* on 25 April, under the title of "Random Talks on 'Dramatic Conceptions'" ("Mantan 'Xijuguan'").

Chinese operas and borrowing certain features of various modern Western schools of drama, producing a large number of experimental plays such as *Mayor Chen Yi* (*Chen Yi Shizhang*, 1981), *The Alarm Signal* (*Jingbao Xinhao*, 1982), *Life, Freedom and Love* (*Shengming Ziyou Yu Aiqing*, 1983), *Heat Stream outside the House* (*Wu Wai You Reliu*, 1983), *Bus-Stop* (*Gonggong Qichezhen*, 1982), *Return on a Snowy Night* (*Fengxue Yie Gui Ren*, 1984), *Wildman* (*Yeren*, 1985) and so on.¹² To various degrees, these plays showed the authors' attempts to break through the conventions of spoken drama with an emphasis on a richer and bolder imagination, less restricted concept of time and space and depiction of the psychological activities of the characters.

Among the innovations of Chinese spoken theatre since the late 1970s, experiments with Brecht's epic theatre formed a strong trend. Brechtian drama, after its first appearance in China twenty years before through Huang Zuolin's production of *Mother Courage and Her Children* in 1959, arrived back on the Chinese stage in 1979, with *Life of Galileo*, directed by Huang Zuolin, in collaboration with Chen Yong, a director of the Chinese Youth Arts Theatre in Beijing, and reached its peak six years later with the First China-Brecht Symposium respectively held in Beijing

¹² Written by Sha Yexin, *Mayor Chen Yi* was produced in Shanghai, 1981, with Huang Zuolin as artistic advisor; Luo Guoxian's *Life, Love and Freedom* was staged in Shanghai, 1983, with Huang Zuolin as general director; *Heat Stream outside the House*, by Jia Hongyuan, was directed by Chen Yong in Beijing, 1983; *The Alarm Signal* (1982), *Bus-Stop* (1983) and *Wildman* (1985) were written by Gao Xingjian and produced in Beijing; and *Return on a Snowy Night* was written and directed by Wu Zuguang in Beijing, 1983. For studies on some of these plays, see Jiang Liu, ed., *Zuolin Studies* (*Zuolin Studies*) (Beijing: Chinese Theatre Press, 1990); Huang Zuolin, *My Xieyi Dramatic Conceptions* (*Wo yu Xieyi Xijuguan*) (Beijing: Chinese Theatre Press, 1990); Antony Tatlow, "Social Space and Aesthetic Time---East Asian Theatre: Transcultural Challenge", *Theatre Research International*, 8 (1983), 208-219; Wolfram Schlenker, "Modern Chinese Drama: Characteristics - Problems - Perspectives", *Theatre Research International*, 8 (1983), 220-232; and Xiaomei Chen, "A *Wildman* between Two Cultures: Some Paradigmatic Remarks on 'Indfluence Studies'", *Comparative Literature Studies*, 29 (1992), 397-416

and Shanghai when six of the German playwright's plays were staged.¹³ More significantly, Huang and other practitioners of theatre were not content with staging Brecht's plays. Huang's previous advocacy of integrating spoken drama with elements of the traditional Chinese operas, the Stanislavskian as well as Brechtian principles to create a new Chinese theatre was finally put into practice.

If, according to Adrian Hsia, Brecht's attendance at Mei Lanfang's performance in Moscow in 1935 served as "a milestone in the development of Brecht's career as a playwright and 'dramaturg,'" and marked "the beginning of Brecht's reception in China,"¹⁴ Huang's successful effort in the 1980s in incorporating Brecht, Stanislavsky and Chinese operas into spoken drama in his experiment to establish a *Xieyi* theatre (variably translated as "Essentialist," or "Imagistic," or literally as "Write-meaning," and later in Huang's own translation, "Ideographical") marked the culmination of the Brechtian presence in China, and served as a landmark of the cross-cultural exchange between China and the West.

The introduction of Brecht to China started much earlier than Adrian Hsia presumes. Hsia claims that Huang's speech on the differences between the traditional Chinese theatre and epic theatre at the Guangzhou Conference of Folk Arts on 2 January, 1951 was "the first systematic introduction of Brecht's theatre to Chinese soil."¹⁵ During that six-hour long marathon talk, Huang gave a summary of the content of Brecht's major plays, a history of the development of his epic theatre,

¹³ These six plays were: *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* directed by Chen Yong (Chinese Youth Arts Theatre), *The Good Person of Szechuan* by Bao Qianming and others (Beijing Central Academy of Drama), *Schweik in the Second World War* (extract) by Lin Zhaohua and Wen Pulin (Beijing People's Arts Theatre), *The Wedding* by Chen Mingzheng (Shanghai Academy of Drama), *Mister Puntila and His Man Matti* (extract) by Li Jiayao (Shanghai Youth Spoken Drama Troupe), and *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* (extract) by Chen Tijiang (Shanghai People's Arts Theatre).

¹⁴ Adrian Hsia, "Bertolt Brecht in China and His Impact on Chinese Drama: A Preliminary Examination", *Comparative Literature Studies*, 20 (1983), p.231

¹⁵ *ibid*

acting techniques, stage design and lighting, and so on. However, Huang's speech was never published.¹⁶ The first published article introducing Brecht and his theatre was over thirty years earlier than Huang's speech. It was by Zhao Ginsheng who, in an article written as early as 1929, analyzed the plot structure of Brecht's early work *Drums in the Night* (1922) and described him as a poetic talent with a very promising future. His article marked the beginning of the Chinese reception of Brecht.¹⁷

A second exclusive article, which was also well ahead of Huang's speech, was by Li Yan in 1944, who described Brecht as a playwright "who had already acquired his fame as a satirist of the petit-bourgeois society as early as the 1930s."¹⁸

Adrian Hsia makes another similar mistake in his assertion that the first translation of any of Brecht's works appeared only in 1955, for, regardless of Brecht's letters, poems as well as short stories which were published in the Chinese edition of the Russian magazine *In Defense of Peace* (*Baowei Heping*) in the early 1950s,¹⁹ Brecht's plays had been brought to Chinese readers during the Sino-Japanese War in the newspapers and magazines of the Communist Party. From 24 to 26 August, 1941,

¹⁶ Huang did not publish his speech straight away, maybe because he was preoccupied with directing plays dealing with the various political situations in the 1950s, and later on the manuscripts and notes for this speech were lost during the Great Cultural Revolution when all his notebooks, as many as ninety, together with almost all the other contents of his personal library were confiscated and never returned. See Huang Shuqin, "My Father Huang Zuolin" ("Wode Baba Huang Zuolin"), in *Zuolin Studies*, pp.421-447 (p.444)

¹⁷ Zhao's article, "Recent German Theatre: Counter-revolution" ("Jinlai Deguo Xiju: Fandong"), actually a free adaptation of Bernhard Diehold's "Anarchie in Drama" in *The Times Literary Supplement* April, 1929, appeared in No. 13 of the magazine *Beijing* published by Beijing Books (*Shuju*), July, 1929.

¹⁸ Li Yan, "The Literary Tendency and Its Representative Writers in the Pre-War Europe and America" ("Zhanqian Oumei de Wenxue Qingxiang jiqi Daibiao Zuojia"), *Chinese Literature* (*Zhongguo Wenxue*), 1 (1944), 41-45 (p.43). The writer's own translation. The original phrase is: "zao yi yi shimin shehui de fengcijia er chiming."

¹⁹ For example, Brecht's "An Open Letter to the German Writers and Artists" was published in No. 7 of the magazine in 1951; his poem "Peace" was translated in No. 10, 1952; and his stories "Threepenny Story" and "The Wish of the Government of the Great Britain" appeared in No. 1, 1953.

the *Liberation Daily (Jiefang Ribao)* saw the publication, in instalments, of *The Informer*, translated by a man under the pen name of Tianlan, which was reprinted from 13 to 16 October, in the same year, by the *New China Daily (Xinhua Ribao)* with an editor's note describing it as "the first in an anti-Fascist short play series." The second of the series, published by the same newspaper on 6 August, 1942, was also by Brecht, *The Two Bakers*, by a translator under the name of Bao Mao. *The Informer* was translated again in 1942 by Ge Baoquan, a professional translator and a poet of some repute then, and was published in the May issue of the *Study and Life (Xuexi yu Shenghuo)*.

The Informer and *The Two Bakers* are actually two scenes from Brecht's *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*. The fact that the editors of the two newspapers of the Communist Party, which very rarely published plays at that time, chose to use translated versions of Brecht's plays shows that they were attracted to the political stance the German playwright assumed. The projected theme of the two short plays as well as their simplicity in form and structure was suitable for the anti-Japanese invasion propaganda, with high probability of being staged. However, whether any group of professional or amateur actors actually staged them on any occasions still remains to be proved.

Adrian Hsia's mistakes in dating the early literary introduction of Brecht to China may have been due to his limited access to research materials as a foreign scholar. Or, he may have restricted the scope of his research to the period after the establishment of the People's Republic of China. In any case, the real Chinese reception of Brecht on a national scale did not occur until after the Communist Party came into power in 1949.

As was traditional with the characteristics of modern Chinese spoken theatre, the acceptance and production of Brecht's plays had much to do with politics. The early translations of Brecht's plays published by the Communist Party were no doubt evidence of this, as was the first production of any of Brecht's dramas in China. Brecht was first introduced to the Chinese soil as a tool of anti-Fascism during the

period of the Sino-Japanese War, and then was produced, nearly two decades later in 1959, as part of the package plan of a cultural agreement between the People's Republic of China and the German Democratic Republic in a search for mutual friendship and peaceful co-existence.

Adrian Hsia is at least correct in pointing out that it was in 1959 that the literary and theatrical reception of Brecht in China finally converged,²⁰ for regardless of the sporadic introduction and translations of Brecht done before 1949, Huang's effort in initiating the acceptance of Brechtian theatre was reinforced that year by Feng Zhi's translation of *Mother Courage and Her Children*,²¹ which provided the stage script of Huang's first production. Huang had already experimented with two successful epic propaganda plays, *The Living Newspaper of the Resist-U.S.-and-Assist-Korea Campaign* and *Eight Red Flags Are Fluttering*, and was recognized as the expert in epic drama and became the natural choice (by the Ministry of Culture) as the director of the play when its production in China became part of the bilateral plan in 1959 to celebrate the 10th anniversary of China and East Germany. Assisted with materials received from the East German Embassy, which included a manual describing the way Brecht himself directed the play, and a documentary film of the Berliner Ensemble's production, Huang committed his best actors, with his wife Danni herself in the role of Mother Courage. Prior to the one month of preparation,

²⁰ Adrian Hsia, "Bertolt Brecht in China and His Impact", *Comparative Literature Studies*, 20 (1983), p.233

²¹ The play appeared in *Selected Works of Bertol Brecht (Bulaixite Xuanji)* (Beijing: People's Literature Press, 1959), the first publication of a translated volume of Brecht's works which was a combined effort done by Professor Feng Zhi, a renowned poet and a leading Germanist in China, his wife Yao Kekun and some other young Germanists at Beijing University, containing thirty-seven poems as well as three plays (*Señora Carrar's Rifles*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, and *Mister Puntila and His Man Matti*).

Huang delivered another speech to his co-workers about the main concepts of Brechtian dramaturgy.²²

The play was ready for the stage on time in October. The artistic features of Brecht's production were followed in great detail. The twelve scenes of the play all retained their individual independence as in the original. Half curtains with words projected on them explaining the plot of the forthcoming scene were adopted at the beginning of each scene so that the audience would know what was happening next. The stage design was simple, too, with only a few indispensable props to designate the setting. Scene 1, for example, consisted of an empty stage with a cart pulled by the two sons, with the Mother and her daughter on it, rambling into sight of the audience. In the last scene the old, miserable Mother was seen on a bare stage again, pulling doggedly all by herself the same shattered cart in the direction of the changing battle fields to continue with her business. Despite all such efforts, however, the play was practically a complete failure. Even though it was staged fourteen times in a month, the theatre never sold more than forty percent of the seats, and many of those who did come left early.

Apart from the low number of seats sold, the play was also a failure in terms of theatre reviews and criticism. Adrian Hsia makes another mistake here in saying that "there was only one published review" about the production of *Mother Courage and Her Children*,²³ by which he probably refers to either the article "The First Production of Brecht's Plays in Our Country" by Tan Ke, published in the *Theatre Journal (Xiju Bao)*, No.33, 1960), or "Mother Courage and Her Children: Artistic Features", by Chen Gongming in the *Shanghai Theatre (Shanghai Xiju)*, No.42, 1959). However, even if the published response was indeed scanty, several articles were

²² Shorter than his Guangzhou speech, yet more or less the same in content, it was published two decades later in his *Talks by a Director* by Literature and Arts Press, Shanghai, 1979, and then collected in *My Xieyi Dramatic Conceptions* by Chinese Theatre Press, Beijing, 1990.

²³ Adrian Hsia, "Bertolt Brecht in China and His Impact", *Comparative Literature Studies*, 20 (1983), p.236

published in newspapers immediately after the première on 6 October, which included Chen Yusun's "Congratulations on the Première of the German Spoken Drama *Mother Courage and Her Children*" in the *Literary Gazette* (*Wenhui Bao*) on 7 October, and Da Chun's "Profound Ideas and Peculiar Style---On the Famous German Play *Mother Courage and Her Children*" in the *Liberation Daily* (*Jiefang Ribao*) on the same day. In order to promote the play, Huang wrote an article himself in the *Literary Gazette*, entitled "Open Your Eyes and See *Mother Courage and Her Children*". Most of these reviews concentrated on the political aspects of the play, emphasizing the cruelty of war and the suffering of poor people. Huang tried, in the meantime, to remind the public of the dialectical dimension of the heroine, saying that "there are no absolutely good or bad guys in Brecht's play," and it was the playwright's original intention "to make, at the end of the play, not only Mother Courage open her eyes, but also the audience open their eyes."²⁴ Huang's stress on the dialectical aspect of Brecht's characters was in line with his production, preserving the original structure, using stage design, props, lighting, costume, etc., which were as close to the German model as possible for the purpose of achieving the alienation effect. However, all these were not appreciated by either the audience or the critics. Tan Ke's short remark at the end of his article that "the performance was a novelty" was a typical conclusion of the scanty reviews of the time.²⁵

Adrian Hsia summarizes the reasons for the failure of *Mother Courage and Her Children* in China in four major aspects: subject matter, costumes, structure and

²⁴ Huang Zuolin, "Open Your Eyes and See *Mother Courage and Her Children*" ("Zhengkai Yanjing Lai Kan Danda Mama"), *Literary Gazette* (*Wenhui Bao*), 8 October 1959, p.3. The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

Zai Bulaixite bi xia, genben tan bu dao shenme shuowei danchun de hao ren he danchun de huai ren. [...] Juzuoja de renwu bu zaiyu zai juben de jiwei shi danda mama zhengkai yanjing, ershi shi guanzhong zhengkai yanjing.

²⁵ Tan Ke, "The First Production of Brecht's Plays in Our Country" ("Bulaixite de Juzuo zai Woguo Shouci Yanchu", *Theatre Journal* (*Xiju Bao*), 33 (1960), 13-14 (p.14). The writer's own translation. The original phrase is: "Zhe shi yige xinying de yanchu."

the theatre habits of the Chinese audience.²⁶ The different subject matter presented by Brecht's play about the Thirty Years War in 17th-century Europe made the play doomed to fail, as most Chinese did not have any idea about it. Even if their minds were still fresh with memories of the two Chinese epic or anti-illusionistic plays directed by Huang respectively in 1951 and 1958, they could not care less what happened in far-away Europe three centuries before Huang's two previous successful plays dealing with familiar matters of the time: the Korean War and the Great Leap Forward Movement. Secondly, the costumes which consisted of ordinary clothes of poor people, were far from exotic or spectacular and did not appeal to an audience whose tastes in the late 1950s were formed more by their experience of Chinese operas in which even the beggars wore colourful and impressive costumes. Thirdly, as the structure of Brecht's epic drama is so arranged as to force the audience to do their own reasoning and make their own judgement, the Chinese were not accustomed to it. They were more familiar with their own theatre tradition which combined entertainment with a ready-made moral, easily distinguishable characters and events, and the unequivocal and exhaustively detailed message. And fourthly, the dogma of the Stanislavskian school which had been dominating modern Chinese spoken drama for a long time made the China of that period unready for Brecht. Especially after the Liberation, Stanislavskian concepts had become the only orthodox dogma. With the assistance of experts from Russia, theatre circles tried their best to understand the philosophy and the techniques of this school. Brecht's works and theories remained practically unknown to the Chinese.

Apart from the above four major reasons which doomed the production of *Mother Courage and Her Children* to fail, Adrian Hsia also mentions another important factor which made the play unwelcome to the Chinese audience at the time, namely, the topic of war. Even if *Mother Courage and Her Children* condemns war, it does not differentiate between the war of invasion and the war of resistance or

²⁶ Adrian Hsia, "Bertolt Brecht in China and His Impact", *Comparative Literature Studies*, 20 (1983), pp.235-236

revolution, i.e. just wars and unjust wars. To a highly politically conscious people, who could still vividly remember the War of Resistance against the Japanese and the War of Liberation that overthrew the Kuomintang government and gave birth to the People's Republic under the Communist Party, as well as the Resist-the-U.S.-and-Assist-Korea Campaign that had taken place not so many years before, "accepting Mother Courage's condemnation of war would in itself also mean rejecting the just wars."²⁷ Given the political topic of war in the play, grave consequences were to result during the Great Cultural Revolution when Brecht, among many other foreign writers, was attacked by the ultra-leftists as a counter-revolutionary petit bourgeois.

The reasons which Adrian Hsia accounts for the failure of the first production of Brecht's drama in China are basically sound, especially those of the different subject, structure and topic which made it rather beyond the comprehension of average theatre-goers. However, his ideas about the other theatre habits such as the unspectacular costumes and the influence of the Chinese people's profound experience with their own traditional form of theatre arts which also combined to stop the production from becoming a success seem rather exaggerated. Huang directed and staged *Mother Courage and Her Children* in Shanghai, the cradle and one of the strongholds of modern Chinese theatre where the general public had long since been familiar enough with imported Western-type drama. Plain clothes costumes were a familiar sight in either traditional or modern theatre of China. As early as the end of the last century, enthusiastic artists had begun to reform and expand traditional Chinese operas. Pan Yuejia and Xia Yuerun in Shanghai, for example, endeavoured not only to reduce singing, and increase dialogues in their performances, but also to modify other aspects of the traditional Chinese theatre, including actions, stage language, music, costumes as well as stage design. Their plays with actors dressed in plain civilian clothes or Western suits managed to attract large audiences who were originally more accustomed to the colourful and impressive

²⁷ *ibid*, p.236

costumes.²⁸ Mei Lanfang, who first acquired his reputation in Shanghai in the early 1910s, was also one of those enthusiastic theatre reformers. When he returned to Beijing, he committed himself to the performance of a series of successful Modern Dress plays which were generally called New Plays. Among the eleven "new plays" which Mei adapted, wrote, and staged within the eighteen months from April, 1915 to September, 1916, three were plays which dealt with current affairs, i.e. *Upheavals of Officialdom* (*Huan Hai Chao*), *The Undaunted Lady* (*Deng Xiagu*) and *A Lock of Hemp* (*Yi Lui Ma*), and for which Mei designed common clothes of the time as costumes.²⁹ Modern Dress plays like these, which were very popular then, further enhanced Mei's reputation as a versatile artist.

On the other hand, costumes, far less colourful and spectacular than those on the traditional Chinese stage were introduced to the Chinese audience together with the early foundation of modern Chinese drama. Its adoption of realistic costumes, namely, the rags put on by characters playing the Negro slaves in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, first prepared Chinese audiences for a different concept of simple costumes of a more realistic theatre. Wang Zhongxian, one of the early reputable artists of spoken drama, relates in his short autobiography the realistic acting of the Civilization Theatre in the late 1910s:

Playing the role of a refugee, Mr. Zhu Shuangyun was covered with dust and dirt, wearing a ragged thin cotton jacket full of holes. As it was an extremely cold wintry day, he was already shivering all over before he walked onto the stage. By the time he made his entrance, he had a runny nose and his eyes were filled with tears as well.[...] The audience were deeply moved.³⁰

²⁸ See Ding Luonan, *Modern Chinese Spoken Theatre Learning from Foreign Theatres*, p.68

²⁹ For Mei Lanfang's New Plays, see Xu Jizhuan and Xu Yuanlai, *The Great Artist Mei Lanfang: Recollections* (*Yi Yishu Dashi Mei Lanfang*) (Beijing: Chinese Theatre Press, 1986), p.15

³⁰ Wang Zhongxian, "My Life as Actor" (*Wode Paiyou Shenghuo*), in *The Early Professional Spoken Theatre: Historical Facts* (*Chuqi Zhiye Huaju Shiliao*), ed. by Zhu Shuangyun (Shanghai: Literature and Arts Press, 1963), pp.63-89 (p.78). The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

The realistic, less colourful costumes, one of the many aspects of spoken theatre different from those of traditional theatre in China, were also extensively adopted by Left-Wing theatres in their realist plays dealing with current affairs during the national revolutions against the Kuomintang government as well as the Japanese invasion in the 1930s and 1940s. In the rural areas of Northern China controlled by the Communist Party, in particular, simple costumes were a must, given the poor living conditions of the time. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, this tradition was carried on, as the Party strongly advocated a simple life style and emphasized a Party's theatre which truthfully reflected real life. Huang's epic plays in the 1950s, which resembled the Brechtian episodic structure, did not resort to the spectacular costumes of traditional theatre, and the general audience welcomed them mainly on the account of the familiar social events which were relived through them.

Adrian Hsia's account of theatre habits of Chinese audiences regarding costumes is apparently far-fetched. Equally wrong is the supposition, by a Chinese critic of Huang, that the latter "who is good at directing comedies," would have had the history of staging Brecht in China re-written if he had had the liberty to choose, "according to his own specialities and personal interest, some other plays by Brecht, such as *The Good Person of Szechuan* or *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, which contain fascinating stories and are also thought-provoking enough."³¹ It is true that *Mother*

Zhu Shuangyun jun ban zaimin, huansheng tuhei, chuanzhe qichuanbadong de danbuo yifu, shi zheng yandong, meiyou dengtai, yi dong de ta quansheng fadou, dao liao taikou, geng shi zheng yanlei biti yiqi yong liao chulai. [...] kanke dawei gandong.

³¹ Fei Chunfang, "Zuolin and His Dramatic Conceptions" ("Yige Xunzhao Zuoze de Juwairen---Zuolin he Tade 'Shifeiershi' de Xijuguan"), in *Zuolin Studies*, pp.56-89 (pp.81-2). The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

Ruguo dangshi Zuolin nengou genju ziji de techang he xingqu zizhu di xuanzhe xiang Sichuan Hao Ren huo Gaojiasuo Hui Lan Ji nayan jiyou yingrenrusheng de gushi youyou fareshengsi de zheli de yuyanju, [...] cong ta suo shanchang de xiju, qingjieju fengge rushou, [...] name, zhengge bulaixite zai zhongguo de yanchushi jiu heng keneng yao chong xie liao.

Courage and Her Children was recommended to China by the former East Germany and the task of directing it was designated to Huang who had been provided with directing manuals and a film version of the play. Predicting the difficulties of making the play acceptable to the Chinese audience on account of its different subject matter or the undifferentiated topic of just and unjust war, and also with regard to the obstacle of the Stanislavskian dogma, Huang declared clearly in the article, which he wrote for the *Literary Gazette* two days after the first public performance of the play, the intention of his theatre: "We actors of the play are not going to present *Mother Courage and Her Children* in such a way as to make the audience feel pitiful or sympathetic about her, as the playwright does not allow us to do so."³² He maintained that the fundamental concept of the Brechtian school was its requirement that audiences use their minds to feel. "If we watch a play in order to weep, to achieve a temporary emotional satisfaction, we may lose our ability to judge things."³³ Huang, following Brecht's principles, did not want any unconditioned emotional responses.

From Huang's article, we can assume that he had no intention of modifying Brecht's play into a more suitable version for his audience. What he wanted to do with it was to reproduce all the fundamental characteristics, its structure, performance style, stage design, lighting as well as costumes, in a word, as close to the original as possible. Theoretically speaking, such a performance should not have been a total failure, as the stage productions of other foreign plays had not been, perhaps with the only exception of Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1898) in Shanghai in 1920, mainly due to its open discussion of the infamous trade of prostitution which was unacceptable to the Chinese audience at the time. Other plays by Shaw, Ibsen, Chekhov, Tolstoy, Strindberg, Shakespeare, O'Neill, and so on, which had all been

³² Huang Zuolin, "Open Your Eyes and See *Mother Courage and Her Children*", *Literary Gazette*, 8 October 1959, p.3. The writer's translation. The original passage is: "Shibushi yingci women jiu yinggei rang guanzhong qu lianmin ta, tongqing ta ne? [...] Women zuowei zhe xi de yanchuzhe ye bu zhunbei zheyan lai chuli."

³³ *ibid.* The writer's translation. The original passage is: "Ruguo women kan liao xi, zhi gu kubizi, zhi tu ganqing shang yishi de faxie, women jiu hen keneng hui shiqu dui shiwu de panbieli."

produced in China before, had proved to be successes, and had also exercised considerable influence upon the modern Chinese theatre practitioners.

What was the reason for the failure of the first production of Brecht's plays in China in 1959? To my mind, there were several major elements to be taken into consideration when we try to account for Huang's set-back. Apart from those correctly summarized by Adrian Hsia, namely, the remote subject matter, and the dogma of the Stanislavskian school, what seems more important is the matter of the particular historic time when *Mother Courage and Her Children* was first staged. During the years from 1958 to 1960, China was plunged into the movement of the Great Leap Forward, a romantic attempt by Mao to solve the country's economic problems by radical and fast action of increasing the amount of land that could be cultivated, and the amount of savings from the land that could be invested in industry.³⁴ Communes in both countryside and city suburbs were set up, which were encouraged to start industries like fertiliser plants, coal or iron mines, repairing workshops or "backyard steel furnaces," and large-scale water works like big dams, hydro power stations or other irrigation systems. Factories in the cities, with more being set up, were called on to boost their production. During such a nation-wide movement, labour was badly needed. Not only were almost all women freed to work outside their homes, many townspeople also had to go and live in villages to guide or participate in the peasants' new projects apart from their normal farming routine. Office workers, including those from the circles of literature and arts, had to volunteer to leave their offices to work long hours either in factories or on farms. That people ate communally in big mess halls and slept communally in huge dormitories so that they could save time to work more hours was a very common phenomenon during those feverish years. Consequently, they had no wish to drag their fatigued bodies to go to the theatre to see a play by a German playwright telling them something about which they had not the faintest idea. Even if Huang and his theatre had taken meticulous efforts,

³⁴ Lois Mitchison, *Chinese Revolution* (London: Bodley Head, 1971), p.82

including their consideration of finishing the play before the last bus so that the audience could go home on time, the idea of sitting through a play so unrelated to what they were engaged in at the moment would have been unappealing. This was a main reason why they either did not come or left when the play was half way through.

Another factor which we may also have to take into consideration is that of time, which is mentioned very briefly by Adrian Hsia.³⁵ Huang had only one month for rehearsal, including adapting the translation for the stage, whereas in East Germany there would be a whole year's rehearsal for the Berliner Ensemble to stage a major play like *Mother Courage and Her Children*.³⁶ Although many of Huang's co-workers and actors had been present when Huang delivered his first long talk on Brecht in Guangzhou eight years before, they still remained largely unfamiliar with the Brechtian school. Although Huang briefed them, their understanding of the play and its required acting techniques was skin-deep. Brecht's theories of anti-illusionism, logical thinking, alienation effects and the like, introduced by Huang, still remained strange to them. Consequently, throughout the rehearsals as well as the performances, as criticised by Fei Chunfang, they assumed too serious or rigid an attitude without being able to show enough dynamic liveliness. "The performance of what seemed to be a 'serious,' faithful reproduction was actually deprived of its original active vitality."³⁷

The failure of *Mother Courage and Her Children* was a heavy blow for many of Brecht's Chinese enthusiasts. "For a long period of time," Huang recalls, "People's

³⁵ Adrian Hsia says, "The translation took two months, so there remained only one months for the preparation for the production of a play by Brecht for the first time." See Adrian Hsia, "Bertolt Brecht in China and His Impact", *Comparative Literature Studies*, 20 (1983), p.234

³⁶ According to Jin Xionghui, one of the cultural representatives from the East German Embassy remarked on this after he watched the production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, directed by Chen Yong of the Chinese Youth Arts Theatre (Beijing, 1986). See Jin Xionghui, "Notes on the First China-Brecht Symposium" ("Zhongguo Shoujie Bulaixite Taolunhui Cheji"), *Foreign Drama (Waiguo Xiju)*, 23 (1985), 143-144 (p.144)

³⁷ Fei Chunfang, "Zuolin and His Dramatic Conceptions", in *Zuolin Studies*, p.81. The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Ying'er yanshu jingzhang youyu er shengdong huopuo buzhu."

faces changed colour as soon as the name of Brecht was mentioned."³⁸ However, "as an experiment towards reforming and expanding modern Chinese drama," as Adrian Hsia points out, "the production was of great significance, for it was not only a play by Brecht, but also a very Brechtian production in that it reproduced the documentary film from Brecht's own *mise en scène*."³⁹ Huang went on with his effort in breaking down the fourth wall in two more of his anti-illusionistic plays, *Fiancée-Leasing* (*Jie Qi*) in 1961 and *Brave the Current* in 1963, while other Chinese scholars were devoted to more translations of Brecht's works and further introduction of the German playwright through their writings.

The movement of the Great Leap Forward failed in that not only were many ambitious schemes uncompleted due to the lack of labour and material, but the regional leaders also began to present false reports about their industrial and agricultural productions which further led to considerable food scarcity in China in the early 1960s. In 1963 Mao was forced to resign as Chairman of the People's Republic by Liu Shaoqi, who succeeded him, and Deng Xiaoping, the Secretary of the Communist Party. Under the practical administration of Liu and Deng, the government's policies altered. In the countryside, unprofitable commune enterprises were shut down, peasants were allowed to own private plots, and there was an increase in privately cultivated vegetables, eggs and pork.

Life became easier in the countryside and in the towns. Lois Mitchison records:

³⁸ Huang Zuolin, "It Requires Special Courage to Pursue Science: On the Première of Brecht's *Life of Galileo* in China" ("Zhuiqiu Kexue Xuyao Teshu Yongqi: Wei Bulaixite de *Jialilue Zhuan* Shouci zai Zhongguo Shangyan er Zuo"), *Literature and Arts Studies* (*Wenyi Yanjiu*), 1 (1979), 3-17 (p.5). The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Changqi yi lai, renmen tan bu se bian."

³⁹ Adrian Hsia, "Bertolt Brecht in China and His Impact", *Comparative Literature Studies*, 20 (1983), p.236

There was a marked freedom of speech.[...] Books were published and films made which were mildly critical of past government policies.[...] Schools and universities were allowed considerable autonomy in choosing their students and staff.[...] Similar freedom was allowed to factories and businesses. Managers were allowed to select their own subordinates and engineers without much reference to their political opinions.⁴⁰

It was amidst this trend of freedom and liberty of the early 1960s that Huang and some other scholars in China seized the opportunity to launch their first large-scale promotion of Brecht, which not only, as Adrian Hsia claims, laid the foundation for future Brecht reception,⁴¹ but also led to Brecht's condemnation during the Great Cultural Revolution.

1962 and 1963 saw many publications of Brecht's works in Chinese, including his plays *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *The Exception and the Rule*, *The Days of the Commune*, and his essays "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting", "Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect", "Street Scene", "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction", "A Short Organum for the Theatre", and so on. At the same time, a number of articles expounding Brecht's drama and theory were also published.⁴² Among them the most significant ones were those respectively by Bian Zhilin, a renowned poet and Shakespearean translator, and by Huang.

Professor Bian's article "Impressions about Brechtian Theatre"⁴³ was written after his visit to East Germany where he talked with Helene Weigel and saw

⁴⁰ Lois Mitchison, *Chinese Revolution*, pp.85-86

⁴¹ Adrian Hsia, "Bertolt Brecht in China and His Impact", *Comparative Literature Studies*, 20 (1983), p.239

⁴² For bibliographical details of the Chinese articles and translations of Brecht's works, see the appendix to *On the Art of Brechtian Theatre (Lun Bulaixite Xiju Yishu)*, [n. ed.] (Beijing: Chinese Theatre Press, 1984), pp.357-362; and also Tak-Wai Wong, "Chinese Reception of Brecht: A Bibliography", *Chinese/International Comparative Literature Bulletin*, 4/5 (1992), pp.70-76

⁴³ Its Chinese title being "Bulaixite Xiju Yinxiang Ji", it was published in four instalments in the magazine *World Literature (Shijie Wenxue)* in 1962, and then as a monograph by Chinese Theatre Press, Beijing, 1980.

productions of some of Brecht's plays by the Berliner Ensemble. Bian's effort in introducing and advocating Brecht through expounding the plot constructions, characterizations, language as well as the social meanings of several of his major plays seems to impress Adrian Hsia so much that he claims it as "the first comprehensive and systematic introduction to Brecht in China."⁴⁴

To my mind, however, the credit should be given to Huang who, following the same effort he had made a couple of times before, published the first of his several important articles on Brecht several months earlier than Bian in the same year. "Random Talks on the 'Dramatic Conceptions'"⁴⁵ was actually a polished version of Huang's speech at the National Symposium of Spoken Drama and Opera Writing in Guangzhou in 1962. This speech had significance in several aspects. Firstly, Huang put forward here for the first time the idea of "dramatic conceptions" (*xijuguan*). There is no equivalent for such a term in the available Chinese or Western dramatic terminologies. Huang invented it as he thought of it as "comprising not only the performance techniques, but also the viewpoint of the whole dramatic art, including playwriting."⁴⁶ His idea of the different dramatic conceptions of Brecht, Stanislavsky and Mei Lanfang surfaced more maturely into a comparison of the characteristics, and the influence of the above three masters' schools, and his effort in combining them to create a new, reformed type of modern Chinese drama two decades later in the 1980s. What is more, it also helped to focus Chinese critics' attention on the academic sphere of Brecht's drama without associating it too much with politics. It marked the beginning of serious scholastic study of Brecht in China. Other Chinese theatre practitioners, who shared Huang's interest, were prompted to study Brecht

⁴⁴ Adrian Hsia, "Bertolt Brecht in China and His Impact", *Comparative Literature Studies*, 20 (1983), p.238

⁴⁵ See note 11 above

⁴⁶ Huang Zuolin, "Random Talks on 'Dramatic Conceptions'", *People's Daily*, 25 April 1962, p.3. The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Yunyong shouduan yong yiding de shijieguan he yiding de yishuguan lai dadao zhege mudi. [...] Ta qianshe dao women zhengge wenyi chuangzuo shang de wenti."

from different angles. Inspired by Huang, Ding Yangzhong, for example, who later became one of the leading Brechtian enthusiasts in China, a professor then, and the present president of the Central Academy of Drama, published his first article "Brecht and His Theatre for Instruction" in the autumn of 1962, trying to analyze the artistic values of what seemingly were highly political plays.

Secondly, for the first time in China, Huang reminded his fellow theatre artists of the fact that the method of presentation of the illusionistic school was only one of many methods of dramatic production. It should not be accepted as the only method, as it was by most modern Chinese theatre practitioners as well as by audiences. Huang's interest in applying Brecht's theory of alienation effects was decided by the fact that it could be used as an effective weapon to break down the fourth wall which had been dominating the modern Chinese stage for so long a time. Brecht's dramatic conceptions, which, as Huang believed, were influenced by Mei Lanfang's art, might be beneficial to the Chinese. He surmised:

If we write modern plays in the fashion of history plays and act them the same way, the spectator will find out that his daily behaviour in a present day environment turns out to be an unusual one under unusual circumstances, a phenomenon which occurs in a specifically designated environment. Criticism or judgment results hereby.⁴⁷

Thirdly, Huang openly declared that he was "not a disciple of Brecht," and his knowledge about him was "indeed very limited." By introducing Brecht, he claimed: "I only wish to clarify the fact that a different conception of the theatre might be

⁴⁷ *ibid.* The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

Women ruguo ba xiandaixi ye an lishiju yiyan de xie, yiyan de yan, name guanzhong jiu hui jue de: ta jingtian de chujing he xingwei yuanlai ye shi yizhong bingfi xunchang de chujing he xingwei, ershi yige teshu de, zai yiding guiding huanjing zhong suo fasheng de xianxiang: pipan ji you ci kaishi.

helpful to us in overcoming various kinds of difficulties in our playwriting."⁴⁸ Whether Huang said all this in order to keep a low profile himself during what he might have sensed to be a short lived period of freedom and liberty is to be conjectured. The fact is, however, that Huang directed only two of Brecht's plays, the unsuccessful *Mother Courage and Her Children* in 1959 and the enormously successful *Life of Galileo* twenty years later, apart from giving advice about a few others, while devoting most of his energy to various kinds of dramatic experiments which finally led to his postulation of *Xieyi* drama around the middle of the 1980s.

Unfortunately, before it could be furthered, Chinese reception of Brecht in the early 1960s met a set-back even before the Great Cultural Revolution began in November, 1965. Like many other reforms which were killed during the ten-year long national nightmare, Brecht's presence in the cultural life of China could only be revived after the downfall of the Gang of Four. Somehow, it seemed that the Gang of Four never liked Brecht, and advocating him or experiments modelled upon his techniques either met with sarcastic comment or blunt denouncement, and theatre artists or translators involved were severely criticized.⁴⁹

As early as 1963, the success of Huang's play *Brave the Current* which was highly praised by Premier Zhou was sneered at by Zhang Chunqiao, the Secretary of the CCP Committee of Shanghai at that time and later one of the important members of the Gang of Four during the Great Cultural Revolution, who commented in a speech at an assembly in Shanghai that Huang's play was praised because Huang was

⁴⁸ *ibid.* The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Wo wufei shi xiwang jiezhong ta lai shuoming yixia butong de xijuguan gui women jie jue chuanguo xingshi de duozhong duoyang zhege wenti shang yousuo bangzhu."

⁴⁹ According to Huang Zuolin, during the Great Cultural Revolution, he and many of his colleagues had to endure long-term false imprisonment (*geli shencha*), being forced to write confessions and self-criticisms, on the alleged grounds of advocating such a petit-bourgeois playwright (*xiao zichan jieji zuojia*) as Brecht, and particularly of conspiring (*heihui*) against the government's cultural policy at the National Symposium of Spoken Drama and Opera Writing in Guangzhou, 1962, when Huang first put forward his idea of "dramatic conceptions." See Huang Zuolin, *My Xieyi Dramatic Conceptions*, p.472, p.474, and also note 11 above

a disciple of Brecht, a superior man of Western theatre.⁵⁰ In the next year, Yao Wen Yuan, the chief spokesman of the House of State who later also became an important member of the Gang, practically condemned Brecht in a speech which was published in the Party newspapers, even if he did not mention Brecht's name. Yao bluntly denounced all those who were following a foreign petit-bourgeois authority on theatre and who wanted to introduce the disgusting techniques of alienation so that Chinese theatre would be alienated from the people, i.e. workers, peasants and soldiers.⁵¹

The Gang of Four, which controlled the propaganda machine of the government during the Great Cultural Revolution, demanded a kind of performing arts as well as other genres of literature in close conformity with Mao's thought, which should extol the greatness of the Party and reflect the class struggle. The hero had to belong to the proletarian class and embody all its virtues, while the villain of the enemy class had to display all his evil to the full. Their respective images of good and bad should come over to the reader or spectator with the utmost clarity.⁵² Accordingly, one of the first results of the implementation of these ideas was the denunciation of performing arts up to this point. Almost all the famous actors and actresses, film producers, theatre directors as well as dramatists came under serious attack. As noted by Colin Mackerras, during the Great Cultural Revolution, "the

⁵⁰ Zhou praised the play as displaying "a new, grandiose style" (*xin fengge, qipuo da*), while Zhang and others sneered at the underpinning *Xieyi* conceptions as totally contradictory (*wanquan duili*) against the principles of "revolutionary" theatre. See *ibid*, p.472, p.476

For the condemnation of Huang as a counter-revolutionary authority (*fandong xueshu quanwei*) on Brecht and Western theatre and the subsequent persecution, see Huang Haiqin, "My Father: Endless Devotion" ("Wode Baba: Buduan Gongxian Ziji de Ren"), in *Zuolin Studies*, pp.448-454 (pp.451-453)

⁵¹ Yao Wen Yuan's speech, entitled "Promulgating a Revolutionary Proletarian Culture" ("Tuixing Wuchan Jieji de Geming Wenhua"), appeared in the *People's Daily* (*Renmin Ribao*) on 3 July, 1964 (p.3).

⁵² Colin Mackerras, *The Performing Arts in Contemporary China* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p.25

professional performing arts all but came to a standstill."⁵³ What dominated theatres in China at the time were modern revolutionary model Peking operas, which were supervised directly by Jiang Qing, Mao's wife, the kernel of the Gang.

Under this strict cultural policy, Brecht was attacked during the mass hysteria of the Great Cultural Revolution in both Shanghai and Beijing, though this was unknown to the outside world and hardly even known inside China. Adrian Hsia gives a detailed account of this in his article where he cites Huang Zuolin as well as Ding Yangzhong as supporters of the dead foreigner Brecht who was beyond punishment. Apart from other alleged sins they had committed, they were denounced for advocating Brecht. They had not only to face harsh criticism at rallies, but also to spend years in solitary confinement or undergo reform through labour on farms, living in shabby huts.⁵⁴ Apart from the notorious alienation effect, Hsia also cites the political message of *Mother Courage and Her Children* and the distorted symbolism of *Life of Galileo* as main reasons for Brecht's condemnation in China. Brecht, along with his Chinese campaigners, was condemned as "intentionally spreading pacifist poison to undermine and weaken the fighting will of the Chinese."⁵⁵ This was hardly surprising, since reviewers, critics as well as Huang himself had already pointed out the political connotations of the lack of discrimination between just and unjust wars in *Mother Courage and Her Children* nearly a decade before when it was first staged. However, Hsia's citation of the symbolism of Galileo pointing his telescope at the sun as another reason for Brecht's condemnation in China seems to be a pure supposition of his own. The sun was the exclusive symbol of Chairman Mao for the radicals during the Great Cultural Revolution.

Brecht dared to let Galileo point the telescope towards the sun as if it were a cannon. Did Brecht's Galileo want to shoot the sun down? How

⁵³ *ibid*

⁵⁴ Adrian Hsia, "Bertolt Brecht in China and His Impact", *Comparative Literature Studies*, 20 (1983), p.238

⁵⁵ *ibid*

dare he discover dark spots in the sun with his telescope? He was besmearing the sun, implying in an under-handed way that the sun had flaws, and so on.⁵⁶

Such a fabulous association seems to be typical of the hysterical minds of the radicals during that period. Yet, when we consider the fact that *Life of Galileo* was first translated by Professor Ding in secret in 1972, revised in 1978, staged in the following year, and published in 1980 when the Great Cultural Revolution had been officially over for more than four years, it obviously could not have been cited as corroborative evidence against Brecht and his Chinese advocates. None of the members of the Gang of Four could read German, and their followers could not possibly have sought assistance from any learned Germanists, as almost all the academic authorities had been removed, either into confinement or sent out to the countryside, with the exception of a few important scientists who worked on nuclear bombs, missiles and satellites and were protected directly by Premier Zhou. Neither could they have relied on library facilities to uncover the supposedly even more venomous bourgeois roots of Brecht's plays, as libraries were forced to close down almost everywhere. Foreign books, whether original versions or Chinese translations, were banned and removed from the shelves. Moreover, Professor Ding would hardly have interpreted for his persecutors *Life of Galileo* in the above ridiculous symbolic fashion, for he translated it in a very adverse situation when he was undergoing reform on a farm, using the paper on which he was supposed to write his self-criticisms and confessions.

In the mass hysteria of the Great Cultural Revolution when any alleged crime without any solid evidence could lead to a denunciation or persecution, sometimes leading to death, suffice it to say that Brecht and his advocates in China were singled out for condemnation. Huang, who was also removed from office and had to spend years as builders' assistant on construction sites following his solitary confinement, was not even put on the invitation list of the welcome party in honour of Koreya

⁵⁶ *ibid*, p.239

Senda, the famous Japanese actor/director and Brecht expert, during his visit to Shanghai in 1968. Even if he did appear at the party, thanks to the strong wish which the Japanese expressed to see him, he had to sit in a secluded corner, far away from Koreya Senda. During the short visit of the Japanese artist and his group of actors to Shanghai, Zhang Chunqiao himself ordered those Chinese theatre workers who attended one of their rehearsals of a short Brechtian-style play to remain strictly expressionless. Huang was there, too. But he could not talk with Koreya Senda on account of the watchfulness of the men sent to stay with him. They could only manage to exchange ideas about Brecht in private for about half an hour in a nearby park when Huang was called to see him off at the airport and they went for a walk together because the plane was delayed.⁵⁷

Huang's unfulfilled dream could only be relived after the downfall of the Gang of Four. Mao realized that the Great Cultural Revolution had gone to extremes under the manipulation of the Gang of Four, and called a halt in time, several months before he died in September, 1976. There had always been persons in the high ranks of the Party and the government who "believed that the full-blooded revolutionary spirit had served its purpose in making the Republic strong, and it was now time for a more moderate, even liberal period of government."⁵⁸ Therefore, almost as soon as Mao was dead, an ideological struggle began. The Gang of Four who opposed the introduction of more moderate policies, were arrested, tried, and put into prison by Hua Guofeng, who became the leader of the country to be shortly succeeded by Deng Xiaoping. Then the period of economic and cultural revival began.

Like many other scholars, professors and scientists who were allowed back to their positions shortly after the downfall of the Gang of Four, Huang was reinstated as the head of the Shanghai People's Arts Theatre. His second chance of directing Brecht's plays came when the Chinese Youth Arts Theatre in Beijing decided to put

⁵⁷ For a detailed account, see Huang Zuolin, *My Xieyi Dramatic Conceptions*, p.249

⁵⁸ Alan Blackwood, *Spotlight on the Rise of Modern China* (Hove, East Essex: Waylang, 1986), p.65

Life of Galileo on stage to mark the occasion of their 30th anniversary in 1979. The decision was made in December, 1978, and Huang was invited over from Shanghai to direct it, with Chen Yong, the renowned woman director of the Youth Arts Theatre, as his co-director.

Like the 1959 production, staging Brecht for a second time had also much to do with the political situation in China. If the production of *Mother Courage and Her Children* was "a glorious political task" assigned to Huang, as he said, "to mark the occasion of the 10th anniversary of both PRC and GDR," and thus "of great significance in furthering the cultural exchanges as well as friendships between the two nations,"⁵⁹ choosing to stage *Life of Galileo* was a deliberate effort to voice the long suppressed aversions of a great number of Chinese science workers, including artists and professors, against the Gang of Four. Adrian Hsia provides a clear account of this as follows:

Why *Life of Galileo* was chosen is obvious. Brecht intended, among other things, that Galileo expose the suppression of culture and science under the Third Reich. The Chinese would equate ecclesiastical suppression in the play with socialist fascism, a term now used exclusively for the catastrophic ten years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). Galileo, a great man of science and a coward---a person of dialectic nature whose existence Chinese literature had forgotten---this Galileo is able to propagate his invaluable scientific findings despite the suppression and dictatorship of the Inquisition. Most Chinese knew similar repressive conditions; the intellectuals, especially, suffered physically and mentally during the Great Cultural Revolution. This play would make everyone re-examine socialist fascism and specifically encourage the intellectuals and scientists to reflect. It is small wonder that some people involved with the production of *Life of Galileo* commented that one would think the play was specially written for a post- Gang of Four production.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Huang Zuolin, *My Xieyi Dramatic Conceptions*, p.155. The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Guangrong de zhengzhi renwu, [...] Dui jiaqiang zhong de wenhua jiaoliu, zhengjing zhong de renmin youyi, youzhe zhongda yiyi."

⁶⁰ Adrian Hsia, "Bertolt Brecht in China and His Impact", *Comparative Literature Studies*, 20 (1983), pp.241-242

Staging *Life of Galileo* also had a practical or realistic significance. The persecutions which Galileo suffered from the Inquisition testified to the fact that science was inseparable from democracy. Without freedom and liberty, there could be no genuine scientific practice. The tyranny of the ignorant, all-powerful church over science centuries ago served as a fine mirror to the socialist fascism of the Great Cultural Revolution when a single word uttered from above would be worshipped as an inviolable truth while any other different opinions would be regarded as heresy. Such an age should be gone forever. Modern China from the late seventies onwards should be rid of socialist fascist dictatorship and allow more freedom and liberty for scientific studies to make the country rich and strong.

Instead of only the one month's rehearsal time he had had twenty years before, Huang now had more than four months. Following a series of talks given by Professor Ding, the translator of the play, who was invited over as adviser, Huang and Chen announced to their group of actors their carefully considered plan in December, 1978. With the failure of *Mother Courage and Her Children* still fresh in his memory, Huang was to adopt an integrated performance method. The customary Stanislavskian methods would be combined with Brecht's alienation effect to create vivid stage images, live human beings in the flesh, which Huang claimed was the ultimate common goal for both Stanislavsky and Brecht.⁶¹

Huang and his co-workers spent nearly two months adapting Professor Ding's translation into a feasible stage text, condensing what might last for six hours of an actual performance of the written text into a three-hour performance text in an effort to project its main ideas and take into consideration Chinese audience habits. What was left out included some long conversations and soliloquies as well as the parts about royal, religious and folk lives in seventeenth-century Italy which were

⁶¹ See Li Jiayao, "The Man Who Brought Brecht's Plays onto the Chinese Stage" ("Ba Bulaixite Xiju Dai shang Zhongguo Wutai de Ren"), *Theatre Criticism (Xiju Luncong)*, 3 (1981), 31-35 (p.32)

presumed to be strange and uninteresting to the Chinese audience. Some scenes were even axed completely, which included scenes 5, 8 and 15.

Apart from cutting the original play, Huang also made some changes and added certain scenes. A chorus consisting of young children had been used as narrator throughout Brecht's play, singing songs of anti-church content in familiar religious music. Huang adopted ballad singers instead, whom he believed to be the representatives of the common people.⁶² The ballad singers, a couple and their little daughter, were present throughout the whole play, in the dance scene, during the interlude, telling the audience explicitly that they were actually acting in a play.

The dance scene in the royal court was added by Huang upon the request of some actors who thought that it would prove to be entertaining to the public which had been deprived of the right of having Latin dancing for a long time. (It had been regarded as a heresy of corrupting nature, and was totally banned during the Great Cultural Revolution.) Whereas there is usually just the music itself without dancing in the scene in Western productions of the play, including that directed by Joseph Losey with participation from Brecht himself, Huang decided to use the fox trot. As the previous scene ended, and before the next scene began, the audience knew from the placards on the half curtain what would happen on stage next, and through the half curtain they could also see the performers, in the spectacular seventeenth-century clothes of the Italian nobles, busy moving the props around. As the music started, they assumed their positions quickly, and while the half curtain was rising, the grand style group formation dance commenced. A vivid picture of an inviolate royal court life of the aristocrats was presented to the audience. The performers did not have ample time to cultivate the feelings of the parts they were going to act. Their direct or semi-direct exposure to the sight of the audience helped to achieve a mutual understanding between them about the fact of a mere play in process, and hence the attainment of

⁶² Huang Zuolin says that they "could represent common people in singing out their wishes." See Huang Zuolin, *My Xieyi Dramatic Conceptions*, p.213. The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Nen daibiao renmin de yuanwang, changchu renmin de xinsheng."

alienation effects not only in the music and dance, but also in between the actors, characters portrayed, and the audience.⁶³

The best example of Huang's combined method of directing *Life of Galileo* was the successful semi-Stanislavskian and semi-Brechtian scene at the end of the play where Galileo is visited by his pupil Andrea. In Huang's modification of the play, the last scene, where Galileo delivers his great self-criticism about his recantation, was the most important summarizing scene of Brecht's play. Galileo frankly admits his recantation, rejecting sympathy. After receiving the manuscript of the book which Galileo wrote, Andrea's attitude changes from contempt to respect, and he interprets his teacher's previous act as a well planned strategy. During rehearsals, the two actors displayed agony, the pupil blaming himself for his misunderstanding while the teacher feeling extremely sad about his cowardice. When they parted, Galileo did not shake hands with him. Instead, he said touchingly in a self-mocking tone, "Do you like to eat fish? It's not the fish that smells; it's me." The acting was moving enough. Yet Huang did not think it satisfying. Something was still missing. He suggested to the actor who played Galileo that he should break down in tears after trying hard to control his feelings, cry out loud, then slowly stop crying to change to laughter, and finally roar with laughter.

After a series of full dress rehearsals given to specially invited guests by the end of March, 1979, *Life of Galileo* was finally presented to the general public on 6 April. The performance was a huge success. From both the general public and the media came admiration for Huang. The complicated, dialectical image of Galileo as a great scientist who was presented differently from the traditional impression, provoked them into thought. Brecht began to be finally recognized after twenty years. His dramatic principles as an independent system of performing art began to be accepted and studied in China.

⁶³ Li Jiayao, "The Man Who Brought Brecht's Plays onto the Chinese Stage", *Theatre Criticism*, 3 (1981), p.34

Commenting on the success of his second production of Brecht's plays in China, Huang remarks lightly: "I was too Brechtianized when I was directing *Mother Courage and Her Children* then not to alienate the audience out of the theatre. The fact that they are so interested in *Life of Galileo* which I directed twenty years later might be because I cease to be too Brechtianized now."⁶⁴ The integration of theatrical elements from two different sources, namely, the Stanislavskian and Brechtian schools, was proclaimed by him to be the first step in his study and introduction of Brecht's theatre, although he was still unable to integrate them with a third theatre tradition, i.e. the methods of traditional Chinese drama. It was not yet the right time. However, Huang said optimistically:

With great interest, we are still hoping that some day in the future we can experiment with a performance method which combines the Brechtian and Stanislavskian systems with Chinese operas. This is what I have been cherishing for so many years.[...] We hope that all those devoted Brechtian colleagues of ours will join together for more practice in the respect.⁶⁵

Thus, the Chinese introduction of Brecht was inextricably caught up in the political and socio-cultural complications in the country. After being first introduced to China as an anti-Fascist playwright, he had endured a reluctant reception in the late 1950s, followed by a short period of attention in the early 1960s. He fell quickly

⁶⁴ Quoted from Li Jiayao, *ibid*, p.35. The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

Dangshi pai *Danda Mama* wo dai bulaixitehua liao, jieguo guanzhong du bei jianli dao juchang waimian qu liao, ershi nian hou zai pai *Jialilue Zhuan* guanzhong ruci yongyue, kongpa yu meiyou qiangdiao nage 'tai' zi youguan ba.

⁶⁵ Huang Zuolin, *My Xieyi Dramatic Conceptions*, p.218. The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

Women renran huaizhe jida de lequ, xiwang youzhaoyiri shijian yizhong bulaixite, sitanni tixi he zhongguo xiqu san jiehe de biaoan fangfa. Zhe shi wo duonian lai zhuiqiu de yizhong biaoan fangfa.[...]Hai xiwang rexin zhili yi bulaixite yanjiu de tongrenmen zai jinhou xiju shijian zhong zai zuo shiyan.

under the frantic cross-fire of the Great Cultural Revolution when he as well as his advocates were condemned. However, the Chinese interest in him survived and Brecht came back onto the Chinese stage in the late 1970s, shortly after the downfall of the Gang of Four. Huang's method in his successful production of *Life of Galileo* was the first fruitful experiment of his "dramatic conceptions," an idea which shows itself as a creative response Huang made under the effect of Brechtian dramaturgy. Although Huang was still unable to integrate the techniques of Brecht and Stanislavsky with Chinese operas, the effect of Brechtian dramaturgy on the aesthetic-theatrical changes in China, as exemplified in his synthesized dramatic techniques and performance style, would become more significant. The revived interest in Brecht, prompted by the success of *Life of Galileo* in 1979, would grow and leave an enormous impact on both traditional and spoken theatre in China.

Chapter V Transplanting Brecht's Drama into China's Native Theatre

Discussing contacts with foreign theatres, Professor Ding Yangzhong divides the recent development of Chinese theatre (referring to both modern spoken theatre and traditional theatre in China) into two phases: that which began at the end of the 1970s when "productions of modern, foreign dramas, or at least, extensive imitation of foreign performance styles, began to introduce the specialities of foreign theatre to China, and slowly influence Chinese theatre", and that which began in the mid-1980s when "foreign dramatic texts, or plays written after the foreign model by Chinese dramatists, were produced in the style of traditional *song-dance* theatre, or at least in modified forms of it."¹

In both these two phases, Brecht seems to have been a significant foreign dramatist whose theatre offered creative potential to Chinese theatre. Other dramatists like Dürrenmatt, O'Neill, Arthur Miller, Shakespeare and others whose dramas were also introduced or modified during the period did not acquire the same level of publicity in terms of either the number of plays performed or the scale of academic studies made in such a short period of time.² Following the successful production of *Life of Galileo* by Huang Zuolin, the enterprise of Brecht translation and research began to flourish. Articles on Brecht began to appear, and translations of his works were published. In the four years from early 1979 to early 1983, for example, more than fifty articles appeared in various journals and magazines (among which some ten

¹ Ding Yangzhong, "On the Insatiable Appetite and Longevity of Theatre", in *The Dramatic Touch of Difference*, pp.169-177 (p.169)

² For example, in China during the 1980s, Dürrenmatt's *An Angel Comes to Babylon*, O'Neill's *Emperor Jones*, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Shakespeare's *King Lear*, *Titus Andronicus* and *Romeo and Juliet*, among others, were staged in the form of spoken drama; *King Lear* was also transplanted into Peking Opera, *Twelfth Night* was rendered into the form of Shaoxing Opera, and *Macbeth* was produced on the stage of Suzhou Opera.

were by Professor Ding), and more than ten of Brecht's plays and almost all of his important essays on drama were translated into Chinese.³ On top of this, the first China-Brecht Symposium, the biggest academic activity centred on Brecht in China so far, was held in April, 1985, when six of his plays were staged and numerous speeches delivered.⁴

In a speech made at the Hong Kong International Symposium on Brecht in December, 1986, Professor Ding Yangzhong argued that Chinese theatre needed Brecht.⁵ The reasons he gave (too long to be fully quoted here) were based on two grounds: firstly, Brecht had established an independent system of drama for the purpose of presenting pictures of the social life of human beings in the twentieth century. He not only tackled the issues of directing and acting, but also developed new ideas of playwriting, stage practice as well as new dramatic concepts and theories. Studies of him from various angles might prove to be beneficial. Secondly, Brecht had been enriched by Eastern cultures, and especially by China. Ancient Chinese philosophies and poetry, and traditional Chinese drama, in particular, had influenced him. However, even if Brecht's aesthetic principles as well as theatre methods evolved in such a way as to bear similarities with those of traditional drama in China in some aspects, he never copied the Chinese way of playwriting and acting. Instead, he subjected those features of the traditional Chinese theatre which appealed to him to a process of appropriation and assimilation so that what turned out finally became a product of his own. This was one of the many facets of Brecht's greatness. Brechtian drama was to be seen as a new, modern drama. In terms of its philosophy and form, it was apparently quite different from traditional Chinese theatre arts. Studies of how Brecht absorbed characteristics of Chinese culture could prove to be

³ See Chapter IV, note 42

⁴ See Chapter IV, notes 13 & 42

⁵ See Ding Yangzhong, "Brecht's Drama and the Present Situation of Chinese Theatre" ("Bulaixite Xiju yu Zhongguo Xiju Xianzhuang"), *Drama, (Xiju)*, 43 (1987), 4-10 (p.6)

enlightening to the Chinese people in the 1980s when they were undertaking a series of reforms, inclusive of those in the field of theatre, by following foreign examples.⁶

Ding's argument points out the need to borrow and learn from foreign traditions. But why the focus on Brecht? Was it because he was influenced by the traditional Chinese theatre in the first place? If so, other Western dramatists had similarly been influenced. Eugene O'Neill, for instance, is said to have been affected by Chinese culture.⁷

Ding's argument gives the impression that the Chinese were eager to reverse the homage Brecht had paid to Mei Lanfang nearly half a century before. There is an important factor which he failed to take into account when he offered his two reasons, namely, the changed ideological atmosphere of China at the time. We must not forget that in socialist China until the late 1970s and early 1980s any artistic endeavours had to be done strictly in line with the Party's policies. Contact with foreign cultures, in particular, had always been a very sensitive issue which had to be handled with extreme care. It was permitted only when handled in such a way as not to bring into the country any so-called corrosive or contaminating elements against the Party's

⁶ *ibid.* The original passage is as follows:

Bulaixite xiju dui woguo xijujie you liandian youwei zhongyao: Qiyi, makesizhuyizhe bulaxite lizhu yu ershi shiji de shidai gaodu, wei liao xiju nengou gengjia bizheng di fanying jexue shidai renlei shehui shenghuo de huaxiang, jingli changqi de jianku tansuo, chuangli liao tade xiju liupai. Tade xiju baokuo xingde xiju guannian, lilun, juben chuanguo, yanju fangfa, wutai shijian ge fanmian de neirong, jue bu jing shi daobianyan fanfa wenti. Women cong xiju de gege jiaodu qu yanjiu da du neng dedao jiaoyi, ta shi yige bajuowanxiang de xijujia, erqie shi ge gexinjia. Qir, ta zai chaungli ziji de xiju liupai de shihou, cong dongfang wenhua, youqi shi zhongguo wenhua zhong xiqu liao fengfu de ziyang, woguo de gudai zhexue, tangshi, tebie shi xiju dui bulaxite chansheng liao yingxian. bulaixite de xiju meiwue yuanze he yanju fangfa zai xuduo fangmian yu zhongguo xiqu shi xiangtong huozhe jingshi de, dan da you bu shengbanyingtao zhongguo xiqu de bianju xingshi he yanju xingshi, ershi zhanzai dade lichang, yong dade zhexue guandian he meixue sixiang xiaohua gaizhao, shizhi biancheng tade dongxi, wei dade liupai fuwu, zhe shi bulaixite gaomin de difang. Bulaixite xiju shi xiandai de xinxing de xiju, jiu jiben zhexue sixiang he xiju xingshi er yan, da yu zhongguo gudian xiqu shi jiongranbutong de. Yanjiu Bulaxite zenyaxiqu zhongguo wenhua de jingyan, keyi shi women congzhong dedao qifa.

⁷ See Horst Frenz, "Marco Millions: O'Neill's Chinese Experience and Chinese Drama", *Comparative Literature Studies*, 18 (1981), pp.362-367

hard-built foundations. Only by viewing it in this light can we investigate the reasons for the flourishing of Brechtian theatre in China from the late 1970s onwards. Compared with all the afore-mentioned foreign dramatists introduced to China at the time, Brecht seemed to be more ideologically acceptable.

Although the focus of the Party's policies shifted from ideological struggles to economic reconstruction of the country shortly after the death of Chairman Mao and the arrest of the Gang of Four in 1976, the general ideology of China remained practically the same. The dominant discourses of values, representations and beliefs were still typical of socialist China, upheld by the country's leaders in an effort to shun or combat what they believed to be Western spiritual contamination brought into the country when it began to be opened up to the outside world. China was still unable to reproduce literary texts which were genuinely free of socialist constraints even if writers had already begun to enjoy more freedom to experiment.

Chairman Mao died, but his shadow loomed over the country (and still does). To commemorate the third anniversary of his death, on 8 September, 1979, the *People's Daily*, the Party's vast circulating newspaper, published a feature entitled "Mao's Conversations with Musicians" which was to be seen as the guideline for the country in its cultural revival after the catastrophic Great Cultural Revolution.

Ironically enough, in the later years of life while he was seeking international recognition and support (for example, his secret meetings with the American Secretary of State, Kissinger, and then the invitation of President Nixon to China shortly before his death in 1976), Mao also saw the need to redeem the country's culture. To him, learning foreign cultures could also be a feasible path leading to what he hoped would be a revival of the country's culture. His ideas in this respect were embodied in his talks with a group of musicians in 1975.

The main points of the "conversations" relate to issues of cultural exchange. According to Mao, the culture of every nation, no matter what distinctive features it may possess, must maintain a certain historical relationship with other cultures, i.e. mutual exchange or learning from each other. As the culture of any nation can never

be closed only to itself, being able to learn from foreign cultures is part of the prosperity and strength of a nation, for it comprises part of the nutrition which the nation needs. The culture of any nation will wither if it repels foreign ideas in order to cling to or consolidate its traditions. Mao admits: "We must realize that Western countries are superior to us in terms of modern culture, especially in arts. If China has its peculiarities in a certain aspect, foreign countries are much smarter in another."⁸ Therefore, he encouraged his countrymen to learn from foreign countries. "There are so many things in Western countries which we must learn," he says, "and we must learn well, because they are eye-openers."⁹

To Mao, learning from foreign models was of significance to the Chinese in their effort to carry on the heritage of their traditional culture. It meant the enrichment or further development of Chinese culture rather than its renunciation. While admitting the "superiority" of modern foreign cultures which he called on his countrymen to learn from, he emphasizes: "It is impossible for us to accept a total 'westernization' of arts, whereas it is a better idea to rely on our own creativity by absorbing foreign things on the basis of Chinese arts."¹⁰ In this respect, he praised Lu Hsun, one of the important modern Chinese literary figures, as a good example of the national culture of China, saying, "Lu Hsun had a good knowledge of both Chinese and foreign cultures, yet he never belittled that of China." And he cautioned that "it is not a good idea to lose confidence in China while learning things from foreign

⁸ Mao Zedong, "Mao's Conversations with Musicians" ("Mao Zedong tong Yinyue Gongzuozhe de Tanhua"), *People's Daily (Renmin Ribao)*, 8 September 1979, p.1. The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Jindai wenhua, waiguo bi women gao, yao chenren zhe yidian, Yishu shang bushi zheyang me? Zhongguo mo yidian you dute zhichu, zai ling yidian shang waiguo bi women gao."

⁹ *ibid.* The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Waiguo de xuduo dongxi du yao qu xue, erqie yao xue hao, dajia keyi jianjian shimian."

¹⁰ *ibid.* The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Yishu shang 'quanpan xihua' bei jieshou de kenengxing hen shao, haishi yi zhongguo yishu wei jichu, xiqu yixie waiguo de dongxi jingxing ziji de chuangzhao wei hao."

countries. The more we learn from foreign countries, the more we should be Chinese, instead of being westernized."¹¹

The publication of Mao's conversations can be seen as a sign of the country's more moderate or tolerant policy regarding introducing foreign cultures. For the first time since the end of the Great Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government openly acknowledged, by publishing Mao's talks, the need for a culture of tradition as an integral part of international culture, as it was related to the Four Modernizations of the country. China had already begun to open up to the outside world, which resulted in a series of drastic social changes, reforms in both economical and political systems, with party secretaries playing less and less important roles in administration, giving way to the regulating function of market law instead of state-planned production, and allowing individuals to own property of land, to run shops or factories. A modernization of culture was also needed. Chinese literary figures were encouraged to experiment, though they still had to follow the approaches and methods as laid down by Chairman Mao. Whatever they were to reproduce must be *Chinese*, namely, typical of socialist China.

Mao's thoughts, along with Marxist and Leninist theories, were still loyally upheld shortly after his death in 1976 by the Chinese government (as is still the case nowadays). Unperturbed by the drastic changes taking place in the Eastern European socialist countries, the Communist Party of China vowed to continue to build a modern "socialist" country of its own. This undoubtedly had a decisive influence upon the literary productions of the country then.

It was a relatively safe choice to introduce Brecht to China where the revival of Chinese theatre was concerned. Politically, Brecht was generally believed by the

¹¹ *ibid.* The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

Lu Xun shi minzhuhua de. [...] Lu Xu dui zhongguo de dongxi he waiguo de dong du dong, dan da bu qingshi zhongguo de. [...] Xue liao waiguo de, jiu dui zhongguo de meiyou xinxin, na buhao. [...] Yinggai yu hao yue zhongguohua, er bushi yue hao yue yanggua.

Chinese to be a Marxist. Although he never became a member of the Communist Party, he was a proletarian playwright who studied both Marx's and Mao's theories of modern dialectics and applied them to his epic theatre. Besides, he was singled out during the Great Cultural Revolution by the Gang of Four for specific condemnation, so a rehabilitation seemed to be a matter of natural course. Culturally, Brecht was closer to China than many other Western dramatists. His two articles about Chinese theatre were generally believed to be the written proof of China's influence upon Western drama.¹² The characteristics of the epic structure of Brecht's plays attracted many comparatists to study how he responded to and modified Chinese dramaturgy to suit the needs of his own theatre. Aesthetically, Brecht was more welcome to the Chinese theatre practitioners as a means of breaking away from the dominance of the Stanislavskian performance techniques.

The Brechtian school of drama began to be transplanted into China's local forms of theatre around the mid-1980s. The first tentative attempt was made by Li Jiayao, a director of the Shanghai Youth Spoken Drama Troupe, who interwove

¹² For Example, Yang Li says: "From either 'On the Theatre of the Chinese' and 'Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting' we could see that [...] he absorbed enough nutriment from the aesthetics of the traditional Chinese theatre, and was enlightened by it. This was an undeniable fact." Yang Li, "On Brecht and China" ("Manhua Bulaixite yu Zhongguo"), *Literature and Arts Studies (Wenyi Yanjiu)*, 1 (1983), 137-144 (pp.140-141). The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Ta cong zhongguo xiqu de meixue yuanze he yishu fangfa shang xiqu liao yinyang, shou dao liao qifa, zhe shi burong hushi de shishi."

Ding Yangzhong says, "Mei Lanfang's tour of the Soviet Union in 1935 left a deep impression on [...] Brecht. [...] For this Brecht wrote long essays. [...] The influence of the traditional Chinese theatre upon Brecht through Mei Lanfang was profound." See Ding Yangzhong, "Brecht and Classical Chinese Drama" ("Bulaixite yu Zhongguo Gudian Xiqu"), *Traditional Theatre Arts (Xiqu Yishu)* 2 (1980), 45-59 (pp.50-51). The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

1935 nian Mei Lanfang fangwen sulian de yanchu, gi [...] bulaixite liuxia hensheng de yinxiang. [...] Bulaixite weici xiexia chang da wan yan de lunwen. [...] Zhongguo xiqu tongguo Mei lanfang de biaoyan dui Bulaixite chansheng de yingxiang, que shi quda shengeyuan de."

Brechtian techniques with *Pingtan*¹³ in his production of *Mister Puntila and His Man Matti* during the First China-Brecht Symposium. The second, perhaps the highlight of all the Brechtian productions in China so far, came two years later in 1987 with Li Liuyi's transplantation of *The Good Person of Szechuan* into Sichuan Opera.¹⁴

Both Li Jiayao's and Li Liuyi's effort in staging Brecht's dramas in the local forms of Chinese performing arts can be seen as part of the attempt of the Chinese to revive their classical Chinese theatre by introducing Brecht into an existing repertoire. Surviving the propaganda and the destructive frenzy of the Red Guards threatening the disintegration of local theatre arts, not only did those few masters or reputable actors of traditional Chinese theatres find that there was a discontinuity in the inheritance of the fundamental performance skills of Chinese operas,¹⁵ they were also

¹³ *Pingtan* (*ping* meaning comment, and *tan*, instrument playing) is a local form of performing art in Suzhou dialect, popular in the eastern part of China comprising Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces. It combines storytelling, ballad singing, acting, jokes, and instrument-playing, by one actress or two sitting on a stool in front of a small table, with a traditional Chinese string instrument (called *Pipa*) in hand which she plays while she sings. Poetic language with lively images is one of its prominent characteristics, as its repertoire is based largely on the classical Chinese novels or short stories. With no emphasis on make-up or costume, the popularity of an actress depends almost entirely on the appropriately combined techniques of singing, narrating, acting with proper gestures and instrument playing which she displays. Its performance used to be conducted exclusively in tea-houses.

¹⁴ Sichuan Opera is one of the oldest schools of traditional Chinese drama combining stylized speaking, singing (in Sichuan dialect), dancing and acting, and a display of martial arts and acrobatics, very popular in and around Sichuan, the biggest province in China, with a population of more than one hundred million. As distinguished from Peking Opera, it has its own unique pattern of music and songs. One of its most striking features is its predominance of clown figures who are witty and humorous, and very skilful in acrobatics.

¹⁵ A Jia, a contemporary Chinese theatre practitioner, notes:

They would ask the old artists of operas to explain the origins of each individual dance and acting movement according to social realism, who, unable to offer satisfying answers, had to admit that they were wrong. Being afraid of teaching the wrong things to their pupils, the old artists were compelled to give up their efforts in teaching traditional operatic techniques. Actors, too, were not quite at ease when they were going through demonstrations of those skills on stage.

Quoted from Huang Zuolin, *My Xieyi Dramatic Conceptions*, p.279. The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

made to see that they had lost their audiences, especially from among the younger generation who appeared to be unattracted to the traditional arts of Chinese drama. Such a dangerous loss of cultural continuity aroused concern among Chinese theatre practitioners, and was even commented on by foreign experts, too. Antony Tatlow notes:

The traditional opera was restored to performance. [...] But the audience composition has changed. It now largely, though not entirely, consists of older people whose experience reaches back to an earlier period. It seems that most younger people are not attracted to the old opera. The arguments I have heard are that it is out-of-date, that it does not deal with the modern world and their problems. This is undeniable, and the continuity necessary for the appreciation of this form as traditionally practised may have been lost for the younger generation. If this continues, the opera will clearly disappear.¹⁶

Shortly after the downfall of the Gang of Four, there began in China a nationwide effort aiming at a revival of traditional theatres, along with other genres of literature and arts, by both the country's leaders and participating theatre practitioners who tried to resurrect the remains of the long buried, traditional performing arts which they optimistically believed could re-gain the artistic levels of the 1950s (the last high point of traditional theatre as represented by Mei Lanfang who died in 1961). A series of national festivals had taken place in Beijing as well as some other cities, each one dedicated to a different branch of the performing arts with the aim of reviving them and saving them from extinction. Awards such as the Mei Lanfang Prize, Mei Lanfang's New Star Prize and the Hundred-Flower Prize had been

Tamen wangwang zhijie gelie di xiang yirenmen tichu meige wudao dongzuo, yaoqiu anzhaoshenghuo de zhenshi huanchu ta de nianjia lai, buran jiu zhengming zhexie du shi xingshi zhuyi de dongxi. Lao yiren jing bu qi sanpansiwen, zhihao ditou rencuo, congci dui houbai zai yie bu jiao jiqiao liao, pa fan wurezidi de cuowu. Yanyuan zai wutai shang yie bu gn fangkai yanxi liao, yixiang zhuanlongxianglong, zhuanhuxianghu de yanyuan, xianzai zai tai shang shouzuwuzuo, wangranruoshi, yinwei pa fan xingshi zhuyi de cuowu.

¹⁶ Antony Tatlow, "Social Space and Aesthetic Time---East Asian Theatre: Transcultural Challenge", *Theatre Research International*, 8 (1983), p.212

established for the purpose of encouraging actors. Also joining forces were the practitioners of spoken theatre who were as concerned with the revival of their own field as with that of traditional operas. But their approaches were different. Instead of directly participating in the stage productions, which was obviously beyond their expertise, they began to carry out experiments which combined both Chinese and Western theatre traditions, ranging from an introduction of operatic principles (such as the concept of time and space) into spoken theatre and an attempt to unite them with Western techniques, to transplanting Western dramas into the classical forms of Chinese operatic arts (joined efforts in this respect).¹⁷

Chinese practitioners were free to experiment, whether encouraged or still bound by the afore-mentioned publication of Mao's instructions on learning foreign cultures for the prosperity of the Chinese native culture. Professor Ding summarizes it as following:

The stultified curiosity of ten years of enforced isolation now looked freely to theatre outside China. For it was not just a question of regaining the former level of spoken drama after such a long time of deplorable unproductivity, but also one of developing theatre in general, through contact with foreign theatre forms.¹⁸

In the attempt to develop Chinese theatre through contact with foreign theatre forms, both Ding Yangzhong and Huang Zuolin played significant roles in introducing Brechtian theatre to the traditional forms of Chinese theatre.

Huang was busy directing *Family (Jia)*, a play adapted by the famous playwright Cao Yu from Ba Jin's novel) and preparing for a tour in Japan later in the year when the First China-Brecht Symposium proceeded from Beijing down to Shanghai in April, 1985. Nevertheless, he managed to give Li Jiayao enough advice

¹⁷ See Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Theatre, Own and Foreign: The Intercultural Trend in Contemporary Theatre", in *The Dramatic Touch of Difference*, p.11

¹⁸ Ding Yangzhong, "On the Insatiable Appetite and Longevity of Theatre", in *The Dramatic Touch of Difference*, p.169

and encouragement in the latter's direction of *Mister Puntila and His Man Matti*.¹⁹ Li's effort to interweave the art of *Pingtán* with his production of Brecht's play was initiated by Huang. Shortly before the symposium commenced in Shanghai, Huang received a Japanese delegation of theatre artists when he pointed out: "If there are some similarities between Brecht's drama and the traditional Chinese theatre, Suzhou *Pingtán* bears even closer resemblances to it."²⁰ It is said that as early as the early 1960s, Huang started to look to the art of *Pingtán* in his effort to reform the spoken drama, and he always expressed his wishes to integrate it organically with epic drama.²¹

Li Jiayao, one of the former students of Huang's who had been working under him in the Shanghai People's Arts Theatre for more than ten years, had his teacher's words in mind when he thought of interweaving Brecht's play with the storytelling of *Pingtán*, and replacing the chorus with singing. Later, he acknowledged: "The

¹⁹ Li Jiayao relates: "Advised by Mr Huang Zuolin, we produced *Mister Puntila and His Man Matti*, interweaving the art of *Pingtán* in this experimentation which integrated elements of both Chinese and Western theatre traditions." Li Jiayao and Liu Yonglai, "Epic Drama and the Chinese *Pingtán*" ("Xushiti Xiju yu Zhongguo Pingtan"), *Theatre Arts (Xiju Yishu)*, 32 (1985), 69-75 (p.69). The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

Women zai Huang Zuolin xiansheng de changyi zhidao xia, paiyan liao *Pandila Laoye he Date Nanpu Madi* zhong de "deng hateluomashan" he "Madi chuzou' lian chang xi, jian woguo de pingtan yishu rouhe jin yanchu zhong, zuo liao yizi zhongxihebi, tuyangjiehe de minzhuhua changshi.

The following year they worked together, with Li as director and Huang as artistic adviser, in the transplantation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* into Suzhou Opera, which was staged during the First Shakespeare Festival in China, and also during the 41st Edinburgh Festival in August, 1987, followed by a tour in the U.K. later in the same year.

²⁰ Quoted from Li Jiayao, "Acting for the Audience of the Present Day---On the Production of an Extract of *Mister Puntila and His Man Matti*" ("Wei Jintian de Guanzhong Yanxi---Dui *Pandila Laoye he Tade Nanpu Madi* Pianduan de Yici Shiyang Paiyan"), *Theatre Journal, (Xiju Bao)*, 337 (1985), 16-17 (p.17). The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Ruguo shuo bushi xiju he zhongguo xiqu you xiangshi zhi chu de hua, name jiangnan pingtan geng jiejing Bulaixite.

²¹ See Li Jiayao and Liu Yonglai, "Epic Drama and the Chinese *Pingtán*" *Theatre Arts*, 32 (1985), p.69. The original passage is: "Huang lao yizhi kewang ba pingtan yishu he xushiti xiju youji de jiehe qilai."

production of *Mister Puntila and His Man Matti* is a continuation of my teacher Huang's attempt to reform Chinese theatre."²²

The fact that Li chose to interweave *Pingtan* with Brecht's spoken drama does not appear to be a mere compromise on the issue of stage language. The Western-type spoken theatre in China always uses standard Mandarin, or *Putonghua*, the official language which is based on the pronunciation of the Peking dialect and the vocabulary and syntax of Northern dialects, except for some occasional use of local dialects in the portrayal of the country's great leaders and other historical figures for the purpose of attaining the so-called historical realism. Li, like other directors in China, also faced the problem of how to attract a larger audience. However, to adopt the storytelling and singing of *Pingtan* was more than an attempt to attract his Shanghai audience who were supposed to be familiar with the language and have an intimate knowledge of the performance. It was a recreation of Brecht's play in Li's effort to bring it closer to his audience's understanding and appreciation in a familiar local form of theatre, and could also be regarded at the same time as an effort to renovate the latter by interweaving it with elements of foreign theatre traditions.

Talking and singing in Suzhou dialect by a *Pingtan* actress during the performance of a Western-type spoken drama was indeed something of a novelty, and can be seen as a conscious attempt by Li to project not only the author's dialectical characterization of Puntila, but also his alienating acting style through interruptions of action. Li Jiayao says: "Just like the technique of *Pingtan* performers' now acting and then narrating and commenting, it was designed as a method to attract audience's appreciation of the performance and to make their own enjoyable active judgement."²³ At the beginning of the play (Li's modification of the last two scenes of

²² *ibid.* The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "'Pan' ju de yanchu shi Zuolin laoshi xiju gaige changshi de jixu."

²³ Li Jiayao, "Acting for the Audience of the Present Day", *Theatre Journal*, 337 (1985), p.17. The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

the original twelve-scene play), Shi Wenlue, an actress of high local repute from the Shanghai People's *Pingtan* Troupe which helped Li composing narrative poems, songs and music for the adaptation, stood at the front of the stage and started the performance by humorously comparing her presence among the Youth Spoken Drama Troupe to that of a door-to-door salesman promoting the sale of his combs in a monastery full of shaven-headed monks, a typical device of laughter-provoking of *Pingtan* which nonetheless drew the attention of the audience to the novelty of the performance.²⁴ Dressed in a kitchen maid's outfit and wearing a blonde wig, and acting as both family cook Laina and narrator of the play, Shi went on to explain the similarities of the art of *Pingtan* and Brechtian drama so far as the alienation effect was concerned, followed by an introduction of the plot structure of the play, mainly touching upon the relationship between Puntila and his servant Matti.

In his co-written article, "Epic Drama and the Chinese *Pingtan*", Li Jiayao enumerates, in a fashion that recalls Brecht's table of differences between dramatic theatre and epic theatre, the similarities between *Pingtan* and epic drama as follows:

Bushi de "jianli xiaoguo" binfi yizhong guding de yangchu jiqiao, da he pingtan yishu de "tiaojin, tiaochu" de yangchu jiqiao yiyang, zhi shi xiying guanzhong xingshang de yizhong fangfa, keyi gi guanzhong yi kaolu de kuaile.

²⁴ Shi addressed the audience:

You may find it strange to see a *Pingtan* actress showing up in a performance by the Youth Spoken Drama Troupe. What am I doing here, talking in Suzhou dialect and wearing foreigner's clothes? Am I not in the wrong place like a peddler trying to sell his combs in a monastery full of shaven-headed monks?

Quoted from Lin Kehuan, "Brecht on the Chinese Stage" ("Zhongguo Wutai shang de Bulaixite"), *Foreign Drama (Waiguo Xiju)*, 23 (1985), 145-149 (p.146). The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

Dajia yiding jue de man qiguai, jinzhao shi qingnian huaju tuan yangchu, ni pingtan yanyuan lai zuo sha? Kaikou lai Suzhou xianhua, shen lang zhao ge shi waiguo ren yishang, weisha? Sai guo dao shihui hang li qu mai yanyaoshui, tuixiao mushu zou jin liao yufusi qu mai ba heshang.

<i>Pingtan</i>	Epic Drama
episodic structure of individual rounded chapters narrating & acting get into and out of the character to act double identity as storyteller & character singing and playing music instrument suspension by the end	episodic structure of individual self-contained scenes narrating to introduce critical acting double identity as actor and character chorus alienation effect to shock audience ²⁵

The playtext used for the performance of *Pingtan* is usually an adaptation of a classical Chinese novel with each chapter starting with a poem giving the main idea of what is going to happen or what has happened in the previous chapter, and stopping abruptly at the end when a crisis arises, leaving the listeners in suspense. On the other hand, narration is one of the fundamental features of Brecht's epic drama, embodied in the plot structure and the way it is presented or acted on stage.

The storytelling and singing constitute the main part of the narrative art of *Pingtan* apart from the playtext. A *Pingtan* actress does not only act as the storyteller to narrate the story, when and where it happened, and what characters were involved, or comment on the actions, she also acts as the character portrayed. This occupies an important part of the performance. The double identity as both the narrator and the

²⁵ Li Jiayao and Liu Yonglai, "Epic Drama and the Chinese *Pingtan*", *Theatre Arts*, 32 (1985), p.71.
The writer's own translation. The original table is as follows:

Pingtan	Xushiti Xiju
fenhuishi jiegou "biaobai" shi xushi tiaojin tiaochu de bianyan chengshihua dongzuo shuanchong shenfen wei shuoshu ren, jiaose tanchang "meiguanzhi" luohui	fenduanshi jiegou muqian jieshao pipan shi de bianyan yishuhua dongzuo shuanchong shenfen wei yanyuan, jiaose hechang dui yong jianlixiaoguo shi guanzhong zhengjing

character enables the actress to enter into the character portrayed to act the story and then become disentangled from it to comment from an observer's or third person's point of view. Wherever necessary, singing occurs, which serves to describe the character and help the plot to proceed.

The double identity which a *Pingtian* actress assumes in a performance was what Li (and of course Huang Zuolin as well) saw as a similarity between *Pingtian* and epic drama.²⁶ A *Pingtian* actress, unrestricted by time or space or the continuity of the plot, can alternatively turn herself into the character portrayed and back into the role of storyteller at any time and sometimes even ask and answer questions about the story on behalf of the audience.

Thus, Li Jiayao chose to modify the minor role of the family cook Laina in the original play into a major role played by a *Pingtian* actress, as she, apart from observing her own acting, occupied an observer's position presenting the relationship between the master and his servant in a class society. It was rather different from the conventional double identity in the art of *Pingtian* in that she also participated in the performance herself.

In his adaptation, Li focussed on the second to last scene "Climbing Hartroma Mountain" which was rendered into something like a single chapter of the playtext for the *Pingtian* performance. Following her opening remarks which explained why she appeared in the performance by the Shanghai Youth Spoken Drama Troupe, Shi Wenlui suggested that the relationship between the servant Matti and his master

²⁶ *ibid*, p.70. Li and Liu say:

In terms of the "alienation effect," these two forms of arts offer even more resemblance to each other. The double identity of a *Pingtian* actor designates the way he combines both "storyteller" and the "character" portrayed to narrate and to act.

The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Shuo dao 'jianlixiaoguo,' zhe lian lei yishu geng bianxian liao jingren de xiangshi. Pingtan yanyuan de shuanchong shenfen jue ding liao ta ji 'shuoshuren' he 'qijiaose' yiji 'xushi' he 'daiyan' yu yi shen de biao yan fangfa."

Puntila was like oil and water which could never be mixed together,²⁷ before she signalled the performance to proceed.

This served to explain why Li chose to apply the art of *Pingtan* to his production and the main dramatic conflict of the play at the same time. The audience was presented with a comment on the characters portrayed beforehand, and were reminded to keep a cool mind about the forthcoming performance.

The actress sat down in front of a small table, took hold of her *Pipa*, and began to sing a lyric which described the beauty of the setting and also the relationship between the master and his servant. The words of the song were projected onto a Brechtian-style half curtain at the back. As it opened, the setting suddenly changed into Puntila's house and Shi Wenlui's role as a third-person storyteller was transformed into that of the family cook Laina. She stood up and turned round to hang her *Pipa* on the wall, which became one of the furnishings in what was now supposed to be Puntila's study. The table as well as the tea set on it, which had not been removed, turned into the desk. The props of *Pingtan* became those on the stage of spoken theatre.

As the plot proceeded, Puntila began to drink as soon as he woke up. Laina moved towards the front in an act of interruption and began to talk to the audience about what she thought of the master's taking to the bottle again after he vowed to go

²⁷ Shi said:

The servant Matti says that the master is not the worst he has seen, because he is quite humane when he is drunk. Master Puntila says that his servant is very bright and able, and is just what he needs. What? Are they getting along with each other? No. To me, master and servant are like oil and water which can never be mixed up well together. Who is right then? Please watch the play.

Quoted from Lin Kehuan, "Brecht on the Chinese Stage", *Foreign Drama*, 23 (1985), p.146. The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

Puren Madi jianqi zhewei laoye shi wo suo pengdao de laoye dangzhong, wu suan shi zuihuai de yige, yinwei li chizui zai jiu hai you dian renxing. Laoye Pandila jian zhege yongren chongmin nenggan, shi wo suo xuyao de. Geme, zhigeng suo qilai li duge guanxi, yinggai xiang rushui yiyang rongqia ge nuol Wu, laoye da puren, bijing naheng? Qin kan yanchu.

"on the wagon." She concluded by pointing out that the weakness inside individual human beings was the worst enemy that one had to defeat.²⁸

According to Li, this episode posed a question which both Puntila and Matti had to answer, and which the audience, in particular, had to consider. The alienation effect achieved prevented the audience from making any emotional correspondence with the character(s) portrayed, leaving enough room for them to consider why Puntila should behave in this way.²⁹

Puntila announced that he was going to climb Hartroma Mountain, accompanied by Matti. Under the effect of alcohol, the wilful and frenzied master demanded that his servant create such a mountain inside his study, which the latter had to do, pretending that he was as intoxicated as the master. Together they sang a song based on *Pingtai* music, and set off on their journey.

Following this, in another act of interruption, Laina stepped forward in front of the half curtains which had just been drawn, and began to comment on this event. She asked the audience to reflect upon the fact that the sober Matti had to join his

²⁸ *ibid.* Shi said: "So, one's biggest enemy in the whole world is himself. If one cannot even triumph over himself, he can never triumph over his enemy." The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Suoyi shuo, shijie shang zuida de diren shi ziji, ruguo ziji du zhansheng bu liao ziji, jiu bu keneng zhansheng dade diren."

²⁹ Li and Liu say:

Hereby, a question is raised for not only the two characters portrayed but also for the audience. Hence the interruption of the empathetical association that has just taken place. Such a technique of the alienation effect is intended to destroy the shared feelings between the audience and the characters portrayed, allowing them space to reflect upon the characters's particular behaviour.

Li Jiayao and Liu Yonglai, "Epic Drama and the Chinese *Pingtai*", *Theatre Arts*, 32 (1985), p.70.

The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

Youci, gi guanzhong tichu liao yige wenti, zhege wenti, Pandila yao jie jue, Madi yao jie jue, guanzhong gen yao sikao. Yushi, ganggang bei juqing ganran liao de guanzhong qingxu yixia bei daduan liao. Zhe yi "jianlixiaoguo" puhuai liao guanzhong yu juzhongren de ganqing ronghe, gi guanzhong sikao weishenme hui you zhexie xinwei tenchu liao siwei de kongjian.

intoxicated master in climbing an imaginary mountain, suggesting the unwilling submissiveness of the poor in a class society.³⁰

At the end of the play, when Matti made up his mind to leave and was saying good-bye to Laina in front of the half curtains, it was a *Pingtian* song from backstage that once again reminded the audience of the impossibility of oil being mixed with water, and asked them to think and judge the relationship between the master and his servant.³¹

Commenting on Li Jiayao's interweaving Brecht's play with *Pingtian*, Lin Kehuan points out:

Pingtian is a popular art of entertainment for the Shanghai audience, in particular. They could attain a better knowledge of the plot structure, the mode of social behaviour of the characters portrayed in Brecht's

³⁰ Shi said:

Puntila becomes intoxicated after he has had a few drops too many, but Matti did not touch the bottle and he knows that his master is extremely friendly when he is drunk. How about it when he is sober? Matti will be still in his realistic position as a servant. A Master is always a master.

Quoted from Lin Kehuan, "Brecht on the Chinese Stage", *Foreign Drama*, 23 (1985), p.146. The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Pandila laoye jiuzui zhihou, xingzhebuobuo, danshi Madi bucheng chizui, xiaode li chizui chengguang na wo dang pengyou yiyang duidai, jiuxing liao nan? Li jiuhui huidai xianshi ge shehui. Laoye beijing shi laoye."

³¹ *ibid.* The words of the song are as follows:

Don't cry, as tears cannot erase the scar deep inside the soul. Oil cannot be mixed with water. The servant has summed up his courage and walked out on his master. Does the master triumph over his servant, or vice versa? No comment. You in the audience reflect on this and draw your own conclusion.

The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

Muo liulei, xinling shenchu de shanhen, yanlei nali xi de qing, you he shui jue buneng xianhuan, yonggan de puren, zouchu de zhuren de jiamen. Wen yishen, shi zhuren zhensheng liao lupu, haishi lupu zhensheng liao zhuren. Wu ke fenggao. Qin guanzhong ziji sikao xia jielun.

play as well as its features through an appreciation of that form of storytelling and singing.³²

Even if Li Jiayao's production of *Mister Puntila and His Man Matti* was only staged a few times, it was of considerable significance in that it was the first of its kind. In the following years in China, there were transplantations of Shakespeare's plays into the traditional forms of Chinese operas during the First Shakespeare Festival in China in 1986, and the even more remarkable effort of operatic transformation of Brecht's *The Good Person of Szechuan* into Sichuan Opera by Li Liuyi in 1987.

Discussing the links between Brecht's drama and the national theatre of China, Li Jiayao emphasizes:

The major part of our audience is comprised of ordinary intellectuals and common people, instead of scholars and experts. We must make sure that our introduction of Brecht to China is in accordance with their aesthetic tastes and properly "nationalized" into their popular forms of traditional performing arts so that they could understand and become interested in his plays.³³

Li agreed that *Pingtán*, given its restrictions as a local entertainment form, was not the only Chinese theatre form which could be interwoven with elements of Brechtian theatre. "Studying and producing Brecht's plays is a complex, multi-dimensional subject which entails different methods and approaches." He encouraged his colleagues to investigate more traditional forms. "There are indeed so many treasures

³² *ibid*, p.147. The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Dui teding de Shanghai guanzhong lai shuo, ting pingtan shi yizhong shanxinyuemu de yule, ye keyi tongguo duibai, changci de xingshang, jieshen dui qinjie beijing, renwu xingwei he Bulaixite xiju de tedian de liaojie."

³³ Li Jiayao and Liu Yonglai, "Epic Drama and the Chinese *Pingtán*", *Theatre Arts*, 32 (1985), p.75.

The writer's own translation. The original is as follows:

Zai zhongguo jieshao bulaixite xiju, zhuyao de guanzhong bushi zhuanjia he xuezhe, ershi yiban de zhishi jieceng ji guangda de "putong ren." Yao shi tamen dui bulaixite xiju chengsheng xingqu bin neng kandong, jiu yinggai genju tamen de shengmei xinli, yi remin dazhong xiwenlejian de minzhu yishu xinshi dui bulaixite xiju jingxing shidu de 'minzhuhua.' Rang bulaixite xiju bian de tongshu yixie, yi yu jieshou yixie, zheyang cai neng rang bulaixite xiju zai zhongguo zhaodao tade turang, cai neng shi bulaixite xiju de yanjiu he yanchu qui de kuaisu fazhan.

in our national performing arts which are worthy of us [spoken] theatre workers' efforts to discover and cherish, since they can be fine models."³⁴

While Li (as well as Huang Zuolin) continued his efforts in combining elements of Western theatre traditions with more forms of traditional Chinese theatre,³⁵ other directors also began to seek an integration between the two by introducing techniques of Chinese operas or modernist approaches into their productions. Chen Yong, for example, used both the traditional Chinese operatic concept of time and space and Brecht's techniques in *Red Skirts Are in Fashion Now* (*Jieshang Liuxing Hongqunzi*) which she directed in 1986, and Shakespeare's *Othello* was transplanted into Peking Opera in Beijing the same year.³⁶ Among these activities, Li Liuyi's production of Brecht's *The Good Person of Szechuan* was perhaps the most remarkable.

Ding Yangzhong played an important role in the production of the Sichuan opera *The Good Person of Szechuan*. During the First China-Brecht Symposium, a production of the play, based on his translation, was made by a group of students and teachers of the Central Academy of Drama. Two years later, in May, 1987, Chengdu's No.3 Sichuan Opera Troupe invited him to work as artistic adviser on the play, based on his translation again, to be produced there.

³⁴ *ibid.* The writer's own translation. The original is as follows:

Yinggai shuo yanjiu he yanchu bulaixite xiju benshen jiushi yige guo jiaodu, duocengci de yishu keti, jue bu shi yizhong yanjiu fangfa suo neng zouxiao de. Geng hekuang zai women de minzhu yanchu yishu zhong zhide women xiju gongzuoshe qu faxian, zhengli he jiejian de yishu kuibao shizai taiduo liao.

³⁵ For example, their joint production of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* rendered in the form of Suzhou Opera during the First Shakespeare Festival in China which took place respectively in both Beijing and Shanghai in April, 1986.

³⁶ For details, see Ding Yangzhong, "Brecht's Drama and the Present Situation of Chinese Theatre", *Drama*, 43 (1987), p.9

That Brecht's *The Good Person of Szechuan* was to be produced on the local stage of Sichuan Province was decided by directors of the Cultural Bureau of the City Council of Chengdu, the provincial capital city.³⁷ Upon discussions with the directors of the Chengdu Cultural Bureau and others, Ding, the director Li Liuyi (who was then a finalist at the Central Academy of Drama), and Liu Shaocong and Wu Xiaofi (the two adapters of the play) all agreed that "neither the artistic characteristics of Sichuan *song-dance* theatre [Sichuan Opera], nor the special characteristics of Brecht's dramaturgy should be subordinate to the other."³⁸ This meant that equal attention was to be paid to both the use of the traditional theatre form and Brecht's ideas to ensure that the form of Sichuan Opera, which was supposed to be intrinsically able to take on foreign elements to renovate and expand itself, should absorb the techniques of Brechtian dramaturgy. The experiment would hopefully prove that "a modern repertoire of good quality is decisive to the question of the continued existence and, in particular, the future development of traditional theatre in general, not merely Sichuan *song-dance* theatre alone."³⁹

Unlike the two practices briefly mentioned above, namely, the transplantations of Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Macbeth* into Chinese drama in 1986, the former being rendered into Peking Opera, and the latter being almost entirely adapted or transformed, including its plot, characters, language and stage design, to suit the acting style of Suzhou Opera, what the adapters of *The Good Person of Szechuan* sought was an "inner harmony" between Brecht's play and the art of a local theatre, which combined the two.⁴⁰ It was to become a dramatic re-creation which

³⁷ *ibid.* Ding says: "In order to revive Sichuan Opera, the Cultural Bureau of Chengdu decided to transplant Brecht's *The Good Person of Szechuan*." The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Chengdu shi wenhuaju wei liao zhengxing chuanju, jue ding yizhi bulaixite de mingzuo *Sichuan Hao Ren*."

³⁸ Ding Yangzhong, "On the Insatiable Appetite and Longevity of Theatre", in *The Dramatic Touch of Difference*, p.170

³⁹ *ibid*

⁴⁰ Liu Shaocong and Wu Xiaofi recall:

harmonized the aesthetic features of both Brecht's theatre and that of a local performing art in China.

Observing the aesthetic principles of both Brechtian theatre and Sichuan Opera, Liu and Wu made extensive cuts to Ding's translation of Brecht's play to create a highly condensed playtext for a two-and-half-hour performance on their local stage. Following the structure of Sichuan operas, the play was considerably shortened in favour of the main storyline of Shen Te (Shui Ta) and Yang Sun, which was preserved with an emphasis on the contrast between good and evil, and the interdependence of human beings upon each other. Not only was the plot construction typical of those on the local stage, the speeches and songs, including the vocal accompaniments, were Sichuanized, with enough local jargon adopted. The characters, too, were modified according to the conventional types of stage figures in Sichuan operatic art, and the minor characters, in particular, including the barber who was rendered into a restaurant owner, were almost all turned into clown figures.⁴¹

It occurred to us that the crucial point in adapting *The Good Person of Szechuan* into Sichuan Opera did not only lie in the co-ordination between the elements of Brecht's play and of Sichuan Opera. More importantly, we needed to look for an element of inner harmony which combined the two different cultures in both of their surface and deep structures.

Liu Shaocong and Wu Xiaofi, "Adapting for the Sichuan Opera *The Good Person of Szechuan*" ("Zai Jiena zhong Fayang Ziji---Chuanju *Sichuan Hao Ren* Gaibian Tan"), *Drama (Xiju)*, 44 (1988), 50-53 (p.51). The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

Women gandao, jiang Sichuan Hao Ren gaibian cheng chuanju, chengbai de guanjian, hai bu zai yu neng fuo jiang "buwei" he "chuanwei," zhongyao de shi, xuyao xunzhao yizhong neizi xiangtong de jingsheng yinsu, shi lianzhong xianran butong de wenhua zai jiaorong huihe zhong dadao bianmian he neiceng de hexie.

⁴¹ Clowns, called *choujue* in Chinese, meaning ugly roles, are characterized by the white-powdered patch on their nose in various shapes such as square, kidney, diamond, etc. Sichuan Opera has a distinctive role-playing feature of presenting various types of clowns, which fall into two major categories, civil clowns (*wengchou*) and military clowns (*wuchou*), including *fangjing chou* (clowns in hat), *paodai chou* (clowns in robes with a jade-studded belt outside), *chayi chou* (clowns in green jacket), *jingzi chou* (clowns in scarf), *chaidan chou* (female clowns) and *kaikou tiao* (eloquent and

As Brecht's Szechuan in his parable drama is a conjectured setting, the production of the play required a stage setting which should not be realistic, but imaginative. Accordingly, Li Liuyi, who tried to maintain the symbolic nature of Chinese operas in compliance with the optimal performance style of the theatre of parable, did not reproduce the features of an old provincial city of Sichuan with every detail fully elaborated, as was usually the case with theatre production of stories which took place in old China. The stage design of his production mainly consisted of distorted masks hanging from the flies, in varying numbers for different scenes, at the back of the stage. He also introduced obvious, visible stage-lighting, used in a technically sophisticated way so as to create big patches of different colours. These were considered as effective, in the sense that "they stress the general message of the play: the distortion of mankind through capitalism."⁴²

Li Liuyi's treatment of the role-types, although made to be fitted to the existing repertoire of categorizations, seems to have undergone certain changes in accordance with his interpretation of the social content of Brecht's play. The minor characters, i.e. the people who become dependent on Shen Te by living in her shop in the original play, were all presented as clowns wearing white-powdered masks. However, whereas clowns in Sichuan Opera are highly entertaining characters with a strong sense of humour, and intelligent persons who choose to act in a pretentiously silly fashion, the clowns in Li's *The Good Person of Szechuan* (*Sichuan Hao Ren*) were embodiments of evil, a cluster of low, selfish, greedy, lazy, and treacherous hooligans. When they were fighting for food in Shen Te's shop, singing, dancing and somersaulting, they did

active clowns), etc. Unlike the clowns in Peking Opera where they can represent both treacherous villains and lower class people such as fishermen, peasants, servants, bellboys, bar persons, poverty-stricken scholars, and so on, the clowns in Sichuan Opera are known as persons of great wisdom and sense of humour, in impersonating particularly petty government officials and henpecked husbands with a very good mastery of extremely difficult skills of acrobatics.

⁴² Ding Yangzhong, "On the Insatiable Appetite and Longevity of Theatre", in *The Dramatic Touch of Difference*, p.174

not create any sense of synthesized beauty as a normal performance on the traditional Chinese stage would do.

Likewise, the gestures Shen Te displayed as she stood there almost motionless in the scene where she tries hard to devise a way to protect herself from being destroyed by those "parasites" suggest another novelty in Sichuan Opera wherein the externalization of inner feelings would normally require songs and dances. Yet she represented her inner struggle between good and evil through facial expressions, which changed from frustration to joyful determination as she came up with the idea of her double identity as Shui Ta.

Li Liuyi's treatment of the clowns and unconventional gestures in his transplantation of *The Good Person of Szechuan* led a number of people to complain, after the play was staged respectively in Chengdu and Beijing around the end of 1987, that it lacked delicacy, that there were no subtle touches of sentiment nor a display of acrobatic skills. In a word, the special techniques and skills of Sichuan Opera were not embodied as desired.⁴³ However, it has been suggested that through his adoption of elements of both Chinese theatre tradition and Western pantomime and dance, Li managed to attain a "break-through in traditional acting technique" and "extended and

⁴³ Wang Xiaoying notes:

After watching the play, many people felt sorrowful amidst huge praise accorded to it that it was not "dramatical" enough. They thought that the stage design and costumes were not beautiful enough, the actions and movements were not delicate enough, there were no drastically emotional scenes and no display of superb skills of acrobatics. The peculiarities of Sichuan operatic skills and techniques were not fully represented.

Wang Xiaoying, "On the 'De-Operatization' of the Sichuan Opera *The Good Person of Szechuan*" ("Guanyu Chuanju *Sichuan Hao Ren* de 'Fixijuhua'"), *Drama (Xiju)*, 47 (1988), 53-55 (p.55). The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

Buguo, bushao ren zai kan liao yanchu yihou, zanyu zhiwai du youxie "bugou xijuhua" de yihan, jue de bujing, fuzhuang bugou youmwi, bianyan chuli bugou jingxi, queshaonongliehanchang de qinggan shufa he jingcai jue lun de gaocao jiqiao, ye meineng genguo di zhanxian chuanju de 'juehuo' dengdeng.

enriched the traditional system of role categories."⁴⁴ Or, in Wang Xiaoying's words, this was what partly constituted "Li's bold and breakthrough attempt to 'de-operatize,' through *The Good Person of Szechuan*, the traditional Chinese theatre, [...] which could be understood in terms of modern playwriting for the theatre of China or Chinese 'nationalization' of Western-type spoken theatre."⁴⁵

Li's "de-operatizations" were perhaps best represented by his treatment of the work scene and love scene in the play. In the scene where Yang Sun forces the workers to work harder, Li introduced a series of dazzling somersaults which created something spectacular on stage. If what Brecht originally intended in his play was the total collapse, both spiritual and physical, of the workers who have to work faster and faster to the quickening rhythm of Yang Sun's clapping hands to symbolize the cruelty of industrialized society, Li merely suggested the idea here by presenting a visual demonstration of the extremely energy-consuming skills of the traditional Chinese theatre.

In the love scene where Shen Te meets Yang Sun, a series of dances were employed. However, unlike the strict conventions involved with the traditional Chinese theatre, Li's characters, one dressed in red, the other in black, danced in intermittently congruous and incongruous steps, which externalized the inner conflicting feelings of the heroine and presented the interlapping or interchange of good and evil. There were also a series of somersaults by grotesque figures in rags who disrupted the atmosphere of the love scene. When Shen Te decided to set up the factory to upgrade her "evil deeds," a huge black cloak appeared on the stage, covering all the characters including Shen Te herself. Holding it in their hands, they

⁴⁴ Ding Yangzhong, "On the Insatiable Appetite and Longevity of Theatre", in *The Dramatic Touch of Difference*, p.175

⁴⁵ Wang Xiaoying, "On the 'De-Operatization' of the Sichuan Opera *The Good Person of Szechuan*", *Drama*, 47 (1988), p.55. The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "*Sichuan Hao Ren* de 'feixijuhua' chuli shi yige dadan de, tupuoxing de changshi. [...] Zhe yidian hai keyi kuoda dao dui 'xiju xiandaihua chuanzuo' he 'huaju minzhuhua' deng keti de lijie."

kicked, jumped, and somersaulted around Shen Te before putting it over her. Watching this scene, as Wang comments,

was like having a very scary nightmare. We felt that the whole soul of mankind was twisting and struggling, and a tragedy was taking place where good was being strangled and crushed by evil. Such a shocking effect of the performance obviously was one that could not be attained by the elegant dancing and singing in our traditional theatre.⁴⁶

As has been discussed earlier, Brecht was finally accepted by the Chinese towards the end of the 1970s because he seemed both culturally and ideologically suitable for the country in its effort to revive its discontinued culture, and theatre, in particular, by learning from foreign traditions. Both of the above two productions of Brecht's dramas can be regarded as remarkable achievements, and seem to have resulted in a recognition that it is possible, and sometimes necessary, to adapt, change, or even rework foreign plays in accordance with one's own conditions, conflicts and conventions.

To some artists and sectors of the public in China shortly after the end of the Great Cultural Revolution, the introduction of Brechtian drama seemed to represent the idea of a progressive, dialectical theatre which could amount to an important form of communication. They were looking ahead, no matter what, politically, socially and aesthetically. Brecht was important to them for he was a post-bourgeois artist who wrote for a new age and devised a dramaturgy which presupposed and envisaged new needs. They were eager to disseminate Brecht, and eager to communicate their understanding of the German playwright to audiences.

⁴⁶ *ibid.* The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

Guankan zheduan "wudao" youru zai zuo yige ningli de emeng, shi ren tongqie di ganshou dao liao zhengge renlei de linghuan zai niuqu, zai zhengzai, ganshou dao "shan" bei "e" suo minmie, suo esa de beiju, er zhezong zhenghan xing de yishu xiaoguo, shi chuantong xiju zhong nazhong youmei huali de wudao suo buneng dadao de.

However, to introduce Brecht's theatre to China was not a simple job of interweaving his acting techniques with elements of Chinese performing arts. When we consider a relationship between China's traditional operatic arts and Brecht, we have to take into account historical factors. The presentational, non-emphatic manner of Chinese acting, which Brecht admired, has its own different purposes and its own different material foundations. Over a period of hundreds of years it developed from near primitive rituals to court performances and finally to a performing art of entertainment at temple courtyards, tea-houses, market-places, etc., with a repertoire that is based on legends, folklore, and more importantly, adaptations of stories and novels that are well-known. Whereas Brecht's theatre was devised for a post-bourgeois audience in a new scientific age to provoke thought, the traditional Chinese theatre, as discussed in Chapter I, emphasizes an aesthetic experience of synthesized beauty through the combined skills of the actor. It is characterized by distinctive showman-style acting methods on account of its popular stage figures. Although it also preaches what can be interpreted as feudalistic morals such as chastity, fidelity, self-sacrifice, loyalty, expectations of upright justice carried out by wise emperors, etc., (hence the loss of touch with contemporaneity) and although it was discontinued for a few decades,⁴⁷ it began to recover its old audiences after restoration. What

⁴⁷ During the Great Cultural Revolution, only eight so-called modern revolutionary model plays were recurrently staged, which included *On the Lake Bank* (*Sajia Bang*), *Storming the Bandits' Stronghold* (*Zhiqu Wehushan*), *Harbour* (*Haigang*), *The Red Women's Regiment* (*Hongse Niangzi Jun*), *Hymn of the Dragon River* (*Longjiang Song*), *The Red Lantern* (*Hong Den Ji*), *The White-Haired Girl* (*Baimao Nu*), and *The Azalea Mountain* (*Dujuan Shan*). Highly propagandistic in content in that these were all stories about the heroic deeds of the proletarians invariably against the Kuomintang forces, the Japanese invaders, the landlords or the counter-revolutionary sabotage, and with the exception of the basic music patterns and stylized movements of Peking Opera which were still followed, these plays were characterized by the introduction of the Western-style orchestras and ballet, elaborate stage design and lighting, realistic costumes and disregard of masks, and too many held gestures to project the heroic revolutionary figures. For Western scholarship on the subject, see Roger Howard, *Contemporary Chinese Theatre* (London: Heinemann, 1978), pp.81-97, pp.104-105; and Mary Grace Swift, "Storming the Fortress of the Peking Opera", *Modern Drama*, 12 (1969), 111-123 (pp.121-122)

worried critics and theatre practitioners such as Antony Tatlow, Li Jiayao and Li Liuyi was the reduced number and the altered composition of audiences in cities where commercial theatres are located. Yet they seem to have overlooked the fact that in countryside and small towns where theatre performances are occasionally held, people still remain generally unaffected by the urbanization or sophistications of big cities. As Tao-Ching Hsü notes,

For the majority of the Chinese people living in villages where no commercial theatres are available the only opportunities of watching plays are the festivals and celebrations which occur only a few times a year and to which, in most cases, everyone is invited.⁴⁸

These "festivals and celebrations" chiefly refer to occasions such as New Year, weddings, important anniversaries, opening ceremonies of public buildings and so on. On such occasions, local theatres are invited to give a private performance, which is considered as appropriate present to the local community.⁴⁹ The traditional Chinese theatre, which consists of more than three hundred local varieties, still boasts a large audience, though not in cities any more, but in small towns and vast countryside where more than ninety percent of the Chinese population live.

Therefore, it is a possibility, for a long time to come, that the traditional Chinese theatre can be preserved as it is in the countryside.⁵⁰ It is an alternative for Chinese theatre practitioners to consider when they try to adapt their traditional forms of theatre, for introducing foreign methods may lead to a diminishing of the characteristics of their own native theatre. This was seen by the renunciation of Chinese operas during the New Culture Movement in the early decades of the

⁴⁸ Tao-Ching Hsü, *The Chinese Conception of the Theatre*, p 15

⁴⁹ *ibid*, pp.15-16

⁵⁰ Some critics suggest that it be preserved as it is, like in Japan where the traditional forms of theatre exist only in exclusive niches of cultural life. Wolfram Schlenker holds such an idea, which is also shared by Xue Dianjie, the stage designer for Chen Yong's production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (Beijing, 1985) wherein the Chinese operatic concept of time and space was adopted. See Wolfram Schlenker, "Brecht in Asia - The Chinese Contribution", in *Brecht and East Asian Theatre*, p.203, p.207

twentieth century when radical Chinese literary figures opted for Western-type spoken drama. As briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, under the impetus of the Western realist school of drama, progressive dramatists of modern Chinese theatre saw the out-of-dateness of the feudalistic morals and rigid conventions of the traditional Chinese theatre. Thus they set out to repudiate it in favour of a more socially conscious theatre modelled upon Ibsen or Shaw. Qian Xuantong, a leading member of the movement, attacked traditional drama on account of its indifference to realistic representation of life, saying:

If there is any genuine drama in China, it should certainly be Western-type drama, definitely not a drama of the "painted-mask" school. How can we have a genuine drama without in the first place completely eliminating and mercilessly overthrowing those people who act as artificial people and talk artificial language? [i. e. artists of Chinese operas]⁵¹

Hu Shi, who was cited in the last chapter as Ibsen's translator, also attacked Chinese operas. He described the operatic techniques of songs, marshal arts and masks as "relics." "Such relics have already become historical ruins in the West," he says. "Only after the complete elimination of these relics can pure drama start to appear."⁵² Although both Qian and Hu were to change their anti-operatic stance to a pro-operatic one later towards the end of the 1920s, their ideas represented a strong trend towards a total denial of the historical characteristics of the traditional Chinese theatre at that time. Mei Lanfang's introduction of Modern Dress drama as part of his effort to

⁵¹ Qian Xuantong, "Sketches No. 18" ("Suigan Lu 'Shiba'"), *New Youth (Xin Qingnian)*, 5 (1918), 36-41 (p.37). The writer's own translation. The original is as follows:

Ru qi yao Zhongguo you zheng xi, zhe zheng xi ziran shi xiyangpai de xi, juebu shi na "lianpu pai" de xi. Yao bu ba na ban bu xiang ren de ren, shuo bu xiang hua de hua, quan shu saochu, jingqing tuifan, zheng xi zenme neng tuixing ne?

⁵² Hu Shi, "The Conception of Literary Evolution and Dramatic Reformation" ("Wenxue Jinghua Guannian yu Xiqu Gailiang"), *New Youth (Xin Qingnian)*, 7 (1918), 10-17 (p.14). The writer's own translation. The original is: "Zhezhong 'yixingwu' zai xiyang jiuyi cheng liao lishi shang de guji, jianjian du taotai wan liao. Zhexie dongxi taotai ganjing, fangcai you chunjie de xiju chushi."

reform Peking Opera around the same period of time cannot be said to be entirely immune from such influence. Both Qian's and Hu's early ideas were also echoed to a great extent in Madame Mao's exclusive cultivation of the eight modern revolutionary model operas, wherein the Western-type orchestras and ballet were incorporated in the depiction of flawless proletarian heroes and down-to-earth counter-revolutionary villains. This particular effort in "modernizing" the traditional Chinese theatre almost resulted in its total collapse and was one of the direct causes which led to the reduction and changed composition of audiences in cities.

Yet as the cultural tyranny of the former government died away, Chinese theatre practitioners were at least relatively free to experiment in the reformation of the traditional forms of theatre. Apart from their eagerness to convey their understanding of Brecht to Chinese audiences, Li Jiayao's production of *Mister Puntila and His Hired Man Matti* and particularly Li Liuyi's transplantation of *The Good Person of Szechuan* at least tested the possibility of China's traditional theatre being integrated with elements of a foreign theatre tradition. Take the Sichuan opera *The Good Person of Szechuan* for example, whereas Chinese operas do not require a set, Li Liuyi employed a nearly surrealist stage design through the creation of huge, deformed masks hanging from the flies on ropes throughout the performance. Symbolizing the basic idea of the distortion of mankind under capitalism, it introduced a new medium of expression (stage design) in Sichuan Opera where it had not been known before. The director's interpretation of the play's content was also carried out in gesture and dance, depicting the psychological battle between good and evil within Shen Te/Shui Ta, or the cruelty of capitalism. The choreography introduced a kind of quasi-realistic, slightly stylized gesture that had not been seen before in Chinese operas. In a similar fashion, Li Jiayao's interwoven gesture of spoken drama and *Pingtan* was also something new in both modern Chinese spoken theatre and the performing art of *Pingtan* itself.

Commenting on the transplantation of *The Good Person of Szechuan* into Sichuan Opera, Erika Fischer-Lichte says: "The foreign text had therefore initiated

changes in the own [sic] traditional theatre form, making it (from an up to now solely re-productive form) productive, therefore revitalizing it and fitting it to the needs of the changed situation."⁵³ Both Li Jiayao and Li Liuyi responded to Brecht's drama in such a way that two disparate theatre traditions were combined. Whether or not it can be regarded as a mistaken belief that introducing Brecht's drama into China's traditional forms of theatre could facilitate a revival, Li Jiayao's and Li Liuyi's efforts owed a debt to the German dramatist. Brecht's theatre prompted them into adopting alternative forms of expression to meet the needs of a country which was seeking more contact with the foreign.

⁵³ Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Staging the Foreign as Cultural Transformation", in *The Dramatic Touch of Difference*, pp.277-287 (p.283)

Chapter VI Huang Zuolin's *Xieyi* Theatre: An Integrated Theatre of Mei Lanfang, Brecht and Stanislavsky

In respect of Brecht's effect upon Chinese theatre practitioners, Huang Zuolin probably commands the most part of our attention. This is not only because he is one of the most eminent and persistent Brecht pioneers, but, more importantly, because his creative response to Brechtian dramaturgy has led to the establishment of a new theatre style of modern Chinese spoken drama, called *Xieyi* theatre. Being mainly a technical integration of Brecht, Stanislavsky and Mei Lanfang, Huang's *Xieyi* theatre, nevertheless, represents a return to the Chinese culture. Like Li Jiayao and Li Liuyi, Huang also tested the possibility of combining disparate theatre traditions into a new form of drama. He did this by reviewing China's native theatre tradition from a new theoretic angle and through a long process of experimentation.

Like many other Chinese aesthetic terminologies, *Xieyi* also has its particular difficulty of translatability. (The opposite is *Xieshi*, literally *write-object*, meaning "graphical," which is sometimes used as a substitute for realism in Chinese.) Michael Gissenwehrer simply translates it literally as "write-meaning."¹ Adrian Hsia coins the word "imagistic" for it,² recalling Ezra Pound. Huang himself tried to put the term into English in 1979 when he described to Arthur Miller his idea of *Xieyi* theatre by comparing it with traditional Chinese drama. However, Arthur Miller could only understand, perhaps still vaguely, what Huang's coinage of an "intrinsicistic theatre" meant after he went together with Huang to watch the production of the Suzhou opera

¹ Michael Gissenwehrer, "To Weave a Silk Road Away", in *The Dramatic Touch of Difference*, p.156

² Adrian Hsia, "Bertolt Brecht in China and His Impact", *Comparative Literature Studies*, 20 (1983), p.244

The Tale of the White Snake (Bai She Zhuan).³ One year later, Huang came up with an English word which seemed more precise for the meaning of the Chinese term: "Essentialism" or "Essentialistic Theatre."⁴ It was towards the end of the 1980s that Huang struck upon the term "ideographics" as opposed to photographics to describe his particular style of theatre which integrates elements of both Western and Chinese theatre traditions.⁵

Huang's idea of *Xieyi* or "ideographical" theatre is based on the four major features of the traditional Chinese theatre which he summarizes as fluidity, flexibility, sculpturality and conventionality.⁶ By fluidity Huang means that the scenes on the Chinese stage run consecutively one after the other without any lowering or raising of

³ Ding Luonan relates that Huang discussed with Arthur Miller the *Xieyi* features of Chinese operas when the latter visited Shanghai in 1979. Huang used the term *intrinsicistic* and explained that it was related to the inner truth in an artistic and artful presentation of incidents and feelings. Such an inner truth was to be rendered in a process of discovering the essence linking feelings with particular incidents and separated from all the non-essential substance. However, Arthur Miller could not understand Huang's so-called *intrinsicistic theatre*. It was while watching the Suzhou opera *The Tale of the White Snake*, invited by Huang, that he began to comprehend the meaning of *Xieyi*. See Ding Luonan, "A Road to a Theatre of China's Own" ("Zou Zhongguo Xiju Ziji de Lu---Lun Zuolin Xieyi Xijuguan de Xincheng jiqi Minzhu Tese"), *Drama (Xiju)*, 55 (1990), 28-37(p.33). The original passage is as follows:

1979 nian, zhuming meiguo xijujia Ase Mile fan hu shi, Zuolin you he ta tandao liao zhongguo xiqu de xieyixing. Dangshi ta shiyong liao yige bijiao jiejing de ci *intrinsicistic*---neizaide, benzhiqingde, bing xiang Mile jieshi shuo: "Women bixu zhaodao shiwu jiqi lianxi yiji qinggan de benzhi, bing ba ta cong fibanzhi de dongxi zhong fenli chulai." Buguo Mile dangshi ren wei shifen dongde Zuolin shuo de *intrinsicistic theatre* jiuqing shi shenme yisi. Houlai zai Zuolin yaoqing ta yiqi guanshang guanju *Bai She Zhuan* shi, zhewei xifan xijujia cai lingwu dao "xieyi" neihan zhi shuozai.

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ Huang claims: "I by no means deny photography as an art, in the same way I do not deny realism on the stage as one art form. Ideographics based on realism means much more than photographics. It contains all that is good in the West (Stanislavsky, Jacques Copeau, Brecht), with all that is good in Chinese traditional theatre." See Huang Zuolin, "'China Dream': A Fruition of Global Interculturalism", in *The Dramatic Touch of Difference*, pp.179-186 (p.185)

⁶ *ibid*, pp.185-186

the curtain, or change of scenery.⁷ Flexibility is closely related to fluidity because there is no change of scene. The staging of dramatic events becomes highly flexible, with no limitation of space and time. Any particular action can be reproduced in any part of the stage at any time.⁸ Sculpturality chiefly refers to the dramatization of characters. "While the characters on the Western stage are two dimensional, being enclosed in a box set, in the traditional Chinese theatre, they stand out three dimensionally."⁹ Conventionality is explained as the "adherence to an elaborate system of commonly recognized conventions" of performance techniques.¹⁰ Openly acknowledging the fictionality of drama, admitting that a play is always a play, is persistently theatrical, traditional Chinese theatre practitioners have created a set of conventionalized actions or movements to present a view of life that is basically symbolic.

Huang's *Xiayi* or "ideographical" concept of drama has caused controversy among Chinese critics who, targeting Huang's key words such as "dramatic conceptions" and "ideographics," try to define it in various ways. Tong Daoming, for example, interprets Huang's dramatic conceptions as "conceptions regarding stage performance and stage reality."¹¹ Ding Yangzhong holds a different opinion. He argues that dramatic conceptions comprise more complicated issues of drama. "Dramatic conceptions," he says, "are overall viewpoints which a dramatist maintains about drama as a form of art, including his philosophical, aesthetic concepts, understanding of the social function of the theatre, adoption of stage techniques and

⁷ *ibid*, p.185

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ Tong Daoming maintains: "The change and development of one's dramatic conceptions is represented by the way one changes his viewpoints about the stage performance and about how to create life on stage." Tong Daoming, "On Dramatic Conceptions" ("Ye Tan Xijuguan"), *Theatre World (Xiju Jie)*, 3 (1983), 17-23 (p.20). The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Xijuguan de zhuanbian, yie jizhong biao xian zai dui wutai yu wutai zhenshi de guannian de zhuanbian shang."

the related principles, etc."¹² Hu Miaosheng feels that Huang's terminologies are only a reflection of personal preference for a theatre style and that debate on them is of secondary importance. He focuses instead on the fundamental characteristics of Huang's drama and suggests that what distinguishes *Xieyi* theatre is its three-fold emphasis on presentation, theatricality and suggestiveness. By this he means a dialectical presentation of incidents which are unrealistic yet are justified by poetic license, a frank acknowledgement of the fictionality of incidents which forsake minute details of live prototypes for the sake of the inner truths, and an indirect, suggestive description of characters through interruptions and montage.¹³

¹² Ding Yangzhong, "Break through Our Conception of Theatre" ("Tan Xiju Guannian de Tupuo"), *Theatre Journal (Xiju Bao)*, 297 (1983), 27-35 (p.28). The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Xijuguan shi xijujia dui xiju zhuowei yizhong yishu xingshi de zhongti kanfa, baokuo xijujia de zhexue, meixue sixiang, dui xiju shehui gonneng de renshi, suo geshou de yishu fangfa, yuanzhe deng xuduo fuza neirong."

¹³ See Hu Miaosheng, "The *Xieyi* Dramatic Conceptions: Features and Significance" ("Xiyi Xijuguan de Yiyi yu Tezheng"), *Theatre Arts (Xiju Yishu)*, 26 (1984), 11-14 (pp.12-13). The original passages are as follows (The translations underneath each of them are the writer's own):

Xieyi xiju de tezheng que zaiyu, zai jieshi neibu zhenshi de qianti xia yunxu gaibian waibu de zhenshi. Zai diyi chengmian shang ta keyi bianxing, shizhen, he shenghuo de ziren xingtai baochi juli, zhe jiu shi zhong zai biaoian. [...] Danshi zai di'er cheng yisi zhong huifu liao tade heqinglixing, [...] hehu danyou shiju de shiren de ganqing. (p.12)
(The first feature of *Xieyi* theatre lies in that it allows a change of the external realism so as to reveal an internal truth. This makes it appear to be transformed, unrealistic, and remote from the natural forms of real life, which is its emphasis on presentation. [...] Yet it is a rational presentation in that it is a poetic justice executed by the author as a poet concerned.)

Xieyi xiju de di'er tezheng shi juchangxing, ji xiju yishu de jiadingxing. Youyu xieyi xiju weiliao jieshi neibu de zhenshi keyi bu juni yu waibu de zhenshi, ying'er ta biran buyuan zhuiqiu zhizhao bizhen yu shenghuo de huanjue, zhishuai di chenren xiju de jiandingxing. (p.13)
(The second feature of *Xieyi* theatre is its emphasis on theatricality, that is, the fictionality of drama as a form of art. Since *Xieyi* theatre is not restricted by minute external details of events so as to bring out inner truths, it does not seek to create illusions of real life, frankly admitting that drama is only fictional.)

Xieyi xiju zhe dui zhijie miaoxie you jiaoda de jiezhhi, chongfeng fahui jianjie miaoxie de zuoyong. Zhengshi zai zhezhong yiyi shang, anshi chengwei xieyi xiju de tezheng zhiyi. [...] Xieyi xiju de anshi tuchu de biaoian zai xingxiang de bulianxiangxing shang, [...] mengtaiqi zhengshi bulianguan de jingtou de zhuhe. (p.13)
(Showing an overall limitation of direct illustration, *Xieyi* theatre makes full use of indirect description, hence suggestiveness as one of its features. [...] The

However much critics continue to discuss Huang's postulation of *Xieyi* drama, which suggests the extent of the impact that Huang has exercised upon the theory and practice of modern Chinese theatre, they seem to have overlooked the particular cultural source with which his ideas are linked. When Huang Zuolin first coined the terminology of "dramatic conceptions" in 1962, he used it in conjunction with the word *Xieyi* as opposed to *Xieshi*, by which he referred to the traditional illusionism of naturalist theatre.¹⁴ Perhaps taking for granted that *Xieyi* is a familiar word to Chinese intellectuals, Huang did not seek to clarify it until nearly twenty years later when with no readily available equivalent in his English vocabulary he found it difficult to explain it to his foreign colleagues and had to rely on the concrete example of traditional Chinese ink and wash paintings (*shuimohua*) to suggest a way to interpret it. He says:

The word *Xieyi* exists in the Chinese vocabulary, but I have not yet been able to find a suitable English equivalent for it. When I was discussing this with foreign friends, I had to compare it with painting. Classical paintings in the West are basically *Xieshi*, while traditional Chinese paintings are predominantly *Xieyi*, which, if we all agree upon this, equally applies to our traditional drama.¹⁵

suggestiveness of *Xieyi* theatre lies in its predominant presentation of characters through interruptions of action [...] which proceeds through the method of montage.)

¹⁴ Huang argues that dramatic methods that have been adopted in the history of world drama can be interpreted as falling into basically two types of dramatic conceptions: the illusionistic and the anti-illusionistic, which he calls *Xieshi* (graphical or realistic) and *Xieyi* (ideographical). He believes that *Xieshi* theatre, which has a history of less than eighty years, has already fully performed its historical functions in the hands of dramatists of naturalist school. See Huang Zuolin, "Random Talks on 'Dramatic Conceptions'", *People's Daily*, 25 April 1962, p.3

¹⁵ Huang Zuolin, "A Comparison between the Dramatic Conceptions of Mei Lanfang, Stanislavsky and Brecht" ("Mei Lanfang, Sitannisilafusiji, Bulaixite Xijuguan Bijiao"), *People's Daily*, 12 August 1981, p.3. The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

Zai zhongwen li women you "xieyi" zhege cihui, danshi wo hai mei zhaodao yige shidang de ying yiwen; he wiguo pengyou tandao zhege wengti shi, wo zhide yong huihua lai biyu. Gudian xiyanghua jiben shi xieshi de, guohua zhe zhuyao shi xieyi de. Ruguo women tongyi zhe yi duibi, namo zhe yie tongyang shiyong yu woguo de chuantong xiju.

Xieyi, the key word in Huang Zuolin's dramatic conceptions, is a term borrowed from traditional Chinese ink and wash painting, particularly of landscapes such as mountains and rivers, an aesthetic standard from ancient history down to the present according to which Chinese painters conduct their artistic creations, and according to which the idea of their works is perceived. Roughly speaking, it means the process of catching the essence of a thing by the free and sparing strokes of a brush on paper, not caring for the details of the thing. Connoisseurs of such paintings receive the message in a direct, uncomplicated way.

However, the idea of close association between traditional Chinese ink and wash painting and operas is by no means Huang's own. Li Ruoshan, the late director of the Chinese Academy of National Paintings, voiced almost exactly the same opinion around the same time.¹⁶ *Xieyi* theatre also appeared nearly half a century ago as part of the effort made by the early Chinese theatre practitioners in adapting the imported Western-type spoken theatre, although there was no apparent connection between it and Huang's.¹⁷ And besides, *Xieyi*, as one of the predominant features of

¹⁶ Li Ruoshan points out: "The Chinese *Xieyi* paintings are an enhanced, sublimated form of art. Peking Opera is a *Xieyi* drama, an enhanced and sublimated drama. The artists of Chinese national paintings must know about Peking Opera, and vice versa." Li Ruoshan, "National Paintings and National Drama" ("Guohua yu Xiqu"), *Beijing Theatre Journal (Beijing Xiju Bao)*, 36 (1981), 42-46 (p.42). The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Zhongguo xieyi hua shi gaodu de hua. Jingju shi xieyi de xi, gaoduo de xi. Hua guohua yiding yao zhi jingfu. Fanzheyiren."

¹⁷ An antecedent theory put forward arguing for the *Xieyi* features of the traditional Chinese theatre was by Yu Shangyuan, Zhao Taimou and others, who launched a National Theatre Movement in the mid-1920s. The basic theory of this movement was very much like the aesthetic doctrine of the Art for Art's Sake school in nineteenth-century Europe which emphasized that art was self-sufficient and need serve no moral or political purpose. The Ibsenite social problem play, which was being extensively imitated in China at the time, was particularly belittled by the dramatists of the movement who regarded pure form transcending practicalities of the mundane world as the ultimate standard for art. However, they tended to explain the *Xieyi* features of Chinese drama in terms of modern Western symbolism, which was unacceptable in China. Although the National Theatre Movement was never really able to achieve anything, in the particular circumstances where there was almost a total rejection of Chinese national culture, the dramatists of the movement maintained a high evaluation of the country's traditional

China's traditional paintings, is also one of the important aesthetic principles which applies to many other forms of art in China, such as poetry, calligraphy, music and dance. Although it is a technically complicated issue peculiar almost only to the Chinese cultural context, it is necessary to expound upon it so as to clarify how Huang related it to his theatre.

Xieyi is actually a short phrase comprising two monosyllabic words in Chinese, literally *write* (*xie*) and *meaning* (*yi*). Leaving the original verb *xie* alone, there are many other connotations of *yi* apart from *yisi* (*meaning*), such as *yihui* (*unspoken understanding*), *yishi* (*consciousness*), *yixu* (*inner quality or feeling*), *yitai* (*mannerisms and external physical features*), *yiqu* (*interest and taste*), *yixiang* (two forms, one meaning *tendency*, the other, *image*), *yijing* (*atmosphere*), *yi* (*message or gist*), and so on. *Yi* can mean any of these or even a combination of them particularly in terms of its application in art. This is shown by theories established by both ancient and modern Chinese aestheticians, poets and painters. The earliest theory can perhaps be dated back to the first century, B. C., when Xun Kuan (Hsün Tse) maintained that "an incompleteness without refinedness cannot be regarded as beauty,"¹⁸ which represents to a great extent the aesthetic principles governing the concept of *Xieyi*. According to his theory, a complete description of life objects in minute details is not approved of by Chinese artists who believe it to be neither possible nor necessary. Later ideas about *Xieyi* followed in a more or less similar fashion. On the fine art of painting, for example, Qu Kaizhi, an eighth-century (A. D.) painter, asserted that

theatre arts and showed strong disapproval of the early Chinese spoken theatre that merely copied Western realist theatre, believing that "we should establish our own national theatre as a bridge connecting the two peaks of *Xieyi* and realist drama." (Yu Shangyuan's point of view. The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Women jianshe guoju yao zai 'xieyide' he 'xieshide' lian geng zhejian, jiaqui yizuo qiaoliang.") See Yu Shangyuan, "On National Theatre" ("Guoju"), in *Collected Essays of Theatre Directors* (*Zhongguo Xin Wenxue Daxi - Xiju Ji - Daoyan*), ed. by Hong Sheng (Shanghai: Good Companion, 1936), pp.47-53 (p.48); and also Ding Luonan, *Modern Chinese Theatre Learning from Foreign Theatres*, pp.70-72

¹⁸ Quoted from Ding Luonan, "A Road to a Theatre of China's Own", *Drama*, 55 (1990), p.31. The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Buquan bucu zhi bu zu yi wei mei."

"contours of the figure must be made to be radiant with the mien."¹⁹ Xie He, one of his contemporaries who was equally famous for his portraits of figures, believed that "the inner qualities and mannerisms [of a figure] must be created in such a way as to be made alive."²⁰ In poetics formulated during the Tang and Song dynasties between the tenth and twelfth centuries by many poets who were also skilful with paintings of natural scenes of mountains and rivers, more emphasis was laid on *Xieyi*. Wang Wei, for example, believed that "imagistic consciousness (*Yi*) precedes poetry composition."²¹ Ouyang Xiu noted that "classical paintings present more *Yi* than contours."²² Su Shi said: "Talking about paintings in terms of its resemblance to real life only reminds me of my neighbours' children."²³

Mainly due to the untranslatability of this peculiar cultural phenomenon, the above ideas of *Xieyi* are unavoidably vague and abstract. What can be said about *Xieyi* is that it is a technically complicated and aesthetically demanding concept. To render all the basic features of an object, an incident, or a figure, both physical and spiritual, through free, simple and sparing strokes, to the unspoken understanding of a connoisseur requires an artist to assume a positive attitude, complete commitment as well as hard work.

Zheng Xie (or Zheng Banqiao), an accomplished sixteenth-century Ming Dynasty artist famous for his *Xieyi* paintings in China, voiced strong opinions against those who were not studious enough to understand the true connotations of the *Xieyi* concept. Zheng says:

Mr Xu Wenchang's paintings of bamboos covered with snow, which he always did with unusable brushes, do not resemble bamboos in their minute details, and the snow, which was done with pale ink washing over the bamboos in free strokes, does not look exactly like snow. Yet

¹⁹ *ibid.* The writer's own translation. The original is: "Yi xing xie shen."

²⁰ *ibid.* The writer's own translation. The original is: "Qi yu shengdong."

²¹ *ibid.* The writer's own translation. The original is: "Yi zai bi xian."

²² *ibid.* The writer's own translation. The original is: "Guohua hua yi bu hua xing."

²³ *ibid.* The writer's own translation. The original is: "Lun hua yi xing shi, jian yu er'tong lin."

the whole image is half hidden there. Nowadays when people paint the same object, they opt for huge bamboos with heavy leaves across the whole picture without leaving any blank space, as it is splashed over with heavy ink. The snow and the bamboos become separate entities. [...] When asked why they should do it in such a way, they say that they cannot be bothered because they intend to achieve the *Xieyi* effect. Alas, the word *Xieyi* has caused too much ado. [...] *Xieyi* can only be attained after an artist has made enough elaborate effort in recreating objects in great detail. If you have not done this, there is no following step towards *Xieyi*.²⁴

Zheng's comment may also apply to Huang's adoption of the term to describe his style, particularly in an examination of his early experimental plays which were presumably in conformity with such an aesthetic. Although I do not imply an abuse of the term, it appears that Huang managed to attain the *Xieyi* effect in his theatre well after he postulated such dramatic conceptions.

There is no evidence suggesting that Huang Zuolin was aware of the technical complication of the *Xieyi* concept in traditional Chinese paintings when he first borrowed the term to illustrate the characteristics of Chinese operas which he intended to incorporate into his spoken theatre. Yet his systematic studies of operas, Brecht and Stanislavsky as well as his experience in experimenting with the three of them, as we shall see later, seems to show that he was probably ready to take the step towards it, although it also shows at the same time that he was hasty to associate China's traditional paintings with his drama.

From among many of the plays which Huang directed, four are singled out by his critics as the main experimental dramas contributing to the establishment of *Xieyi* theatre: *The Living Newspaper of the Resist-U.S.-and-Assist-Korea Campaign*, *Eight*

²⁴ Zheng Xie, *The Complete Works of Zheng Banqiao (Zheng Banqiao Quanjì)*, (Shanghai: World Books, 1935), Part V, pp.5-6. The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

Xu xiansheng hua xuezhu, chun yi shou bi pao bi zao bi duan bi wei zhi, jue bu lei zhu; renhou yi dan moshui gouran er chu, zhi jian ye shang, wan fi xue ji, zhu zhi chuantì, zai yingyao jian yi. Jinren hua lnong zhi da ye, lue wu puo que chu, zai jia xuanran, zhe xue yu zhu lian bu xian ru. [...] Weng qi gu, zhe yue: wobeì xieyi, yuan bu ju ju yu ci. Shu bu zhi xieyi er zi, wu duoshao shì. [...] Bi jìgon er huo neng xieyi, fi bu gon er sui neng xieyi ye.

Red Flags Are Fluttering, Brave the Current and *The Symphonic Poem of the New Long March* (*Xin Changzheng Jiaoxiang Shi*, 1978).²⁵ As Huang himself also agreed that these four plays represented his experimentations "governed by an overall, specific conception of drama," i.e. "the *Xieyi* conception,"²⁶ it is helpful to use them as a starting point in our examination of *Xieyi* theatre to see how Huang's theory and practice are linked together.

Huang's *Xieyi* theatre is underpinned by the traditional concept of fluidity in structure, yet the methods which he adopted to ensure such an effect recall Brecht. In respect of the conventional practice of modern Chinese spoken theatre, Huang's theatre aimed at "fluidity of a single line." Whereas the standard dramatic construction of modern Chinese plays is restricted in time and space by the concept of act/scene-divisions, Huang's *Xieyi* plays, *The Living Newspaper of the Resist-the-U.S.-and-Assist-Korea Campaign* and *The Symphonic Poem of the New Long March*, for instance, all assume a narrative form of continuous scenes, which resemble Brecht's epic drama. To tackle the problem of natural connections and quick changes between the scenes, Huang used a commentator, storyteller or even a recitation team. The group of old workers standing on a small protruding platform in his *Brave the*

²⁵ Li Xiangchun, for example, points out that Huang's *Xieyi* theatre is based on his practice of theatre. He lists these four plays out of many of Huang's experimental dramas which the director did over a long period of time. See Li Xiangchun, "Study Zuolin to Further Develop *Xieyi* Theatre" ("Yanjiu Zuolin, Tuijin Xieyi Xiju de Chuangzhao Fazhan"), in *Zuolin Studies*, pp.1-6 (p.3)

Yao Mingrong also cites these four plays as an embodiment of the four major *Xieyi* features of Huang's theatre, arguing that these are produced by a kind of dramatic conceptions that are not restricted by a box-set stage practice and the idea of the fourth wall, and that do not seek to create illusions of life on stage. See Yao Mingrong, "Re-thinking the Four Experimental Plays of *Xieyi* Dramatic Conceptions" ("Xieyi Xijuguan Sici Shiyang Zai Renshi"), *Theatre Arts (Xiju Yishu)*, 26 (1984), 7-10 (p.8)

²⁶ Huang Zuolin, *My Xieyi Dramatic Conceptions*, p.472. The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Zhaxie shiyang shi zai yige zhong de, teding de xijuguan zhipai xia jinxing de, [...] Xieyi xijuguan."

Current, for example, acted as the storytellers or commentators of the play and sometimes took part directly in the performance as well, to ensure the continuous, uninterrupted development of the plot. *The Living Newspaper of the Resist-the U.S.-and-Assist-Korea Campaign*, for example, comprises so many stories of the atrocities of foreign imperialists in China which stretch over more than half a century that the effect of fluidity is lost. Its commentator, at most, appears to function more as a lecturer on modern Chinese history.

Flexibility, as the second feature of Huang's *Xieyi* theatre, does not reveal itself as derived only from traditional Chinese paintings and the similar aesthetic in operas. It can also be seen as an instance of Western influence to which Huang was susceptible. Whereas traditional Chinese *Xieyi* paintings often leave a fair amount of empty space, the significance lying in the very emptiness itself, dramatists pursuing the same principle can be free from the restriction of the concept of time and space in narrating dramatic events on stage. The painters' sparing strokes and free splashing of ink on paper are of equal referential value to dramatists who cut short their plays when there is no significant story and elaborate when there is much to tell. The artistic image created on a *Xieyi* stage is to be free and flexible. In this sense, flexibility, in combination with fluidity, constitutes the peculiar concept of time and space in traditional Chinese drama. The few stage props such as an empty table or a couple of stools can be used to represent many objects and settings, which are seen in the mind's eye of the audience.

Unlike traditional theatre in China which creates an imaginary change of time and space by using its complete set of conventionalized movements, spoken theatre requires more realistic elements. Huang tried to deal with the problem through mainly two means. Firstly, there is a constant change of time and space within a single scene. In *The Living Newspaper of the Resist-the-U.S.-and-Assist-Korea Campaign*, he devised two mobile platforms which designated a quick change of setting when pushed around, a variation of the rotating platform used in the European theatres. *A Thousand and One Days* (*Yiqianlingyi Tian*, 1965), which is not included in the group

of the four experimental plays, though, can also be seen as an instance of similar Western influence. In the climatic scene of this play where several postmen search through street after street for the addressee of an unclearly addressed letter, Huang adopted two huge triangular prisms which were placed parallel with each other on the stage. On each side of them was painted a different picture of buildings. The actors who played the postmen shuttled on bicycles around the rotating prisms, hence the novel effect of the constant change of time and space within a single scene. Huang admitted this particular Western influence although he argued about it in terms of other operatic techniques which he adopted at the same time:

Apart from learning from the ancient Greek theatre arts for such a technique, we also try to carry on our national theatre tradition of *paoyuanchang* [completion of a circular movement on stage, done by an actor who moves his feet briskly in a dancing fashion, accomplished by songs and music sometimes, on the whole stage to designate a change of time and space]. We have only further developed it hereby in that both the actors and the setting move in a circular fashion.²⁷

The other method which Huang used in his effort to endow spoken theatre with the *Xieyi* feature of flexibility was the creation of a multiple dimensional structure of time and space on stage, i.e. an interlocking construction in a single scene of different time and space sequences. This is a commonly used technique of the traditional Chinese theatre. However, the embodiment of such a *Xieyi* feature cannot be found in either one of the four plays cited, perhaps with the exception of *Fiancée-Leasing* (*Jie Qi*), a traditional operatic play which Huang transplanted onto the stage of spoken drama in 1961. As this was one of the few operas with which Huang

²⁷ Quoted from Du Shixiang, "Zuolin: A Good Teacher and Friend of Us Stage Designers" ("Women Wutai Sheji Gongzuozhe de Lianshi Yiyou"), *Theatre Criticism* (*Xiju Luncong*), 1 (1981), 29-33, p.31. The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

Zhege jing de yunyong, chu liao xiang gu xila xiju yishu xuexi jiejian wai, women hai jichen liao xiqu yichan de "paoyuanchang," zhi buguo zai zheli women you fazhan liao yibu, lian ren dai jing yiqi "payuanchang" jiu shi liao.

experimented on the stage of spoken theatre, it seems to be of significance in terms of its *Xieyi* features which Huang sought to transplant. It is a comedy of errors which ends by a foolish magistrate awarding a young girl to the wrong husband. A young scholar by the name of Li, whose wife has died not long before, finds himself too poor to go to the oncoming Imperial Examination. His father-in-law, who has taken back the dowry, promises to return it as soon as he marries another woman. Upon learning this, the greedy villain, Zhang, offers to lease his fiancée to Li, provided that he would have half of the dowry certain to be returned when Li presents the girl to his father-in-law as his wedded wife. As luck would have it, the old man likes the "new bride" so much that he insists on the young couple staying overnight. Without seeing his fiancée back before sunset as agreed, the worried villain goes to the city to look for her but is trapped behind the double city gates. In Huang's direction of the play, the two stories taking place at two different sites were presented synchronizedly in one scene. On one side of the stage, the embarrassing situation of the young scholar and the girl being placed in the chamber of the old man's house gradually diminishes as they begin to fall in love with each other; on the other side, the villain fumes with anger in his dilemma at not being able to do anything but wait for daybreak. The intertwining dialogues, soliloquies and actions of the characters portrayed on each side of the stage, separated only by a wall visible in the mind's eye of the audience, combined to produce a highly comic effect.

The success of this construction of time and space in the play probably impressed Huang. Not only does he mention it frequently in his writings,²⁸ examples of this kind can also be found in his other later productions. For example, in *Brave the Current* (1963), a propaganda play about the determination of the Chinese engineers and technicians in a steel plant to rely on themselves following the sudden withdrawal of the Russian experts when China and the former Soviet Union were engaged in bitter ideological criticisms of each other in the early 1960s, Huang tried

²⁸ See Huang Zuolin, *My Xieyi Dramatic Conceptions*, p.230; and also Huang Zuolin, *Talks by a Director*, pp.220-221

to incorporate the dimensional operatic structure of time and space organically into the form of spoken drama. In the scene of discussing a new project, the front part of the stage was occupied by a group of people waiting impatiently in the meeting-room for the factory manager to show up to commence the discussion, while a spotlight directed the audience to the inner part of the stage with the factory manager and a foreman standing in front of a furnace, observing the on-going experiment. This produced a contrasting image of outer activities and mental state of the characters on the two parts of the stage. Following this, the factory manager hurries back to the meeting, which was also directly presented. Huang employed a multiple segmentation of space. The actor started from the inner or higher part of the stage, where there was a furnace, through the central part, which was supposed to be the space between the workshop and the office building where he is caught up in a rainstorm, and to the front or lower part of the stage where there was supposedly a meeting-room. The whole process was completed in less than a quarter of a minute with very scanty actions involved. It left an impression both of the cinematic technique of montage and of a variation of the traditional Chinese operatic technique of *paoyuanchang*.

Huang's idea of the *Xieyi* feature of sculpturality of traditional Chinese theatre arts relates to the dramatization of characters. "Whereas the box set of the stage of conventional spoken drama encloses its characters in two dimensions," Huang maintains, "the traditional Chinese stage projects the figure of the character portrayed, making it three dimensional."²⁹ The conventional spoken drama here mainly refers to realist theatre, which emphasized the depiction of natural environment in its dramatization of characters. In such a theatre, a box set normally enclosed the characters like framed paintings. The dramatization of characters on the traditional Chinese stage, on the other hand, bears resemblance to the art of sculpture in the sense that all the realistic elaborations of the material surroundings of the character(s) are left out for the sake of projecting the figure(s) portrayed. There is no

²⁹ Huang Zuolin, "China Dream': A Fruition of Global Interculturalism", in *The Dramatic Touch of Difference*, p.185

effort to create a realistic setting, it is created in the mind's eye of the audience through the actor's performance on a flat, bare stage and changes as he moves. All the presentations and changes of setting depend on the hypothetical movements and gestures made by the actor, or his appropriate attitudes and responses to them. In this sense, actors of the traditional Chinese theatre reproduce an atmosphere that is associated with the character's physical and psychological state(s) of being, which brings about various kinds of imaginative environment.

Judging from the characterizations in his early experimental *Xieyi* dramas, the main method which Huang adopted to attain the *Xieyi* feature of sculpturality in spoken drama seems to be one that combined both Chinese and Western theatre traditions as well as techniques of other genres. Examples can be found in *Brave the Current*, and *The Symphonic Poem of the New Long March*. Wang Gong, the major role of the factory manager in *Brave the Current*, struck a pose, or held gesture, upon his first appearance on the stage, standing triumphantly and confidently on a fast moving steam engine hauling a large supply of raw material for his steel plant. Yet, instead of being similar to those held gestures often used by actors in operas, it looked more like a close-up of a figure in a movie. In *The Symphonic Poem of the New Long March* the effect of sculpturality was, according to Huang himself, mainly achieved by a group of actors playing scientists in the scene of "Spring Time for Science" where they stood in two lines on the steps of an ascending platform which narrowed down from the front stage until they joined together at the top of the platform on the inner part of the stage where an actor in the role of a senior scientist held up a teenage university student, signifying generation after generation of Chinese scientists.³⁰ Such a "human ladder," however, makes one wonder whether it was a simplistic

³⁰ Huang says that the particular scene represents "imagistically 'the spirit of the human ladder' which has a profound *Xieyi* feature and brings the play to an exciting climax." Huang Zuolin, *My Xieyi Dramatic Conceptions*, p.475. The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Xinxiang de zhanshi liao 'renti jingshen,' yijing shengyuan, xincheng yige zhengfenrenxin de gaochao."

geometrical interpretation of the complicated concept of the sculpturality of the traditional Chinese theatre.

Huang's idea of conventionality refers to the fundamental artistic method generally adopted by artists of Chinese operas, based on their assumption of the hypothetical nature of the theatre. Its representation depends on a certain formula of performance which not only includes conventionalized acting techniques, but is also related to the afore-mentioned fluidity, flexibility and sculpturality. Compared with the traditional Chinese theatre, modern Chinese spoken theatre does not have and cannot apply the whole system of conventionalized dancing and acting skills of its counterpart. But this does not mean that it necessarily rejects those hypothetical acting formulae as a whole. Huang's *Xieyi* theatre, like the traditional Chinese theatre, also admits the theatricality of all its productions, and therefore requires highly perfected acting skills and conventionalized actions and gestures.

Looking at all of Huang's experimental plays leading to the establishment of his *Xieyi* theatre, however, we find that the application of the conventionalized acting skills of the traditional Chinese theatre is a relatively new thing. There is almost none of this in his early plays, with perhaps the exception of *The Symphonic Poem of the New Long March* where episodic scenes such as "Beyond the marsh lands" consisted of a few dances which are reminiscent of Chinese operas, and one scene in *Life, Freedom and Love* (*Shengming, Ziyou yu Aiqing*, 1983), where the main role simulated the motion of a flying seagull indicating his longing for freedom. As we shall see later, effective application can perhaps be only found in his *China Dream* (*Zhongguo Meng*, 1987), the play that is formally designated as *Xieyi* drama.

Through the above brief examination of the four experimental dramas in relation to the four major *Xieyi* feature of Chinese operas, we can see that examples of Huang's *Xieyi* dramatic conceptions are few and far between, and these examples also reveal to a certain degree his indebtedness to Western cultural traditions. This suggests that Huang wished to strengthen his theory by looking for evidence in his

early practice up to the end of the 1970s, and wanted to convince his audiences or critics that these early efforts were made with a raised level of theoretical consciousness. By doing so, however, Huang cannot help leaving an impression that he was eager to set his own mark above his colleagues who were also engaged in innovating modern Chinese spoken theatre.³¹ Although he argued, as we shall see later, that the ideas of establishing a *Xieyi* theatre of his own came to him about half a century ago, and although he called on his colleagues in the early 1960s to explore new methods through a possible integration of Stanislavsky, Brecht and Mei Lanfang, which, as discussed in Chapter IV, did not happen, he appeared to have difficulty in providing convincing evidence when he reiterated his *Xieyi* dramatic conceptions in the early 1980s. Yet as a persistent artist who was reinstated to his former profession after the Great Cultural Revolution, Huang was finally able to experiment further with the concept of *Xieyi* drama now that he formally put forward such an idea again. He succeeded in doing so with *China Dream* in 1987.

The theme of *China Dream* is the cultural conflicts between China and the West. It is divided into eight scenes through which three dreams are narrated. The first is a kind of American dream by Ming Ming, originally a promising actress who left China for America and has become a successful restaurateur, although her acting talent is recognized in the end. In her dream she returns to the mountain village in China where she was exiled during the Great Cultural Revolution and meets her former lover Zhi Qiang with whom she discusses love, life and death. The second dream relates to John, Ming Ming's boyfriend, who is a lawyer and is obsessed with ancient Chinese philosophies. In his dream he meets and talks to an ancient Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi (Chuang Tse) about personal world views and matters of

³¹ Over the last few decades, Huang has enjoyed a characteristic nickname in relation to his attempts for novelty: *Huang Xuetou*, meaning *Smart Huang/Jester Huang*, as the original *Xuetou* in Shanghai dialect stands for either *smart ideas* or *skilful jesting* or both. See Yu Shuqin, "Xieyi Theatre: Playtexts and Features" ("Lun Xieyi Huaju Wenxue Juben de Tezheng"), in *Zuolin Studies*, pp.180-216 (pp.208-209)

human society. The third dream is that of Zhi Qiang's about his hope of building a dam on the river on which he has been steering bamboo rafts downstream so that his job can be replaced by steam-boats. In the end, Zhi Qiang dies on the river while Ming Ming and John get married. The husband, financed by his rich wife, is to resign from his lawyership to concentrate on his study of Chinese philosophies. Those who cherish American dreams can have a Chinese dream for a change.

Such a plot structure comprising dreams one following the other seems to make the play particularly suitable for an integration of operatic techniques. *China Dream*, subtitled as a *Xieyi* drama, shuttles in time and space between two different settings of America and China. The plot construction unrolls smoothly with the psychological activities of Ming Ming, who is caught up between the conflicts of the Western and Oriental cultures and yet is in search of the values of self existence. Huang eliminated the stage settings of all the eight scenes of the play, leaving a bare stage with only a sloping round platform and a few decorative strips of ribbons on it. The changes in time and space between the mountain village in China and the cosmopolitan city in America were ideographically designated by the performers' gestures and dances on stage. These can perhaps be seen as an effective embodiment of the *Xieyi* feature of fluidity.

The *Xieyi* feature of flexibility can be seen through Huang's application of the free concept of time and space. In between scenes 3 and 4, for example, Ming Ming, after making Mark's acquaintance at a party given by her grandfather, goes together with him to the cinema to see a *Tarzan* movie and they end up unhappily going in separate directions due to the disagreement between the ideas they hold about the movie and life, in particular. The constant changes of setting, from a main street to a car, to the cinema, and then back to the street, were all represented through the performers' brief gestures and dialogues. Scene 2 and scene 7, both of which are set in a mountain village in China where Ming Ming was forced to live before she emigrated to the United States, consist of stories in the mind of the heroine which are intertwined with the setting where she finds herself. The intertwining of time and

space in both Ming Ming's recollections and in the practical reality of her life in America, as Ding Luonan comments, "not only enlarges the capacity of the play itself, but also offers a penetrating insight into the conflicts between Eastern and Western cultures through direct, lively visual images."³²

The main position of characters portrayed in the relationship between setting and their dramatizations is also emphasized in *China Dream*. As Ding Luonan puts it, "The stage picture of held gestures which Huang seeks is not composed by any realistic elaboration to reproduce the truth of reality, but by a special imaginary environment with quick tempo and rhythm, powerful enough to rock the audience's souls."³³ The *Xieyi* feature of sculpturality seems to be attained mainly through poses or sculpture-like held gestures which are done by the actor and actress amidst stylized dances, and is closely related to the feature of conventionality.

The effective application of conventionalized acting skills of the traditional Chinese theatre appears abundant, with the actor's acting out the scenes of car-riding, surfing, and steering bamboo rafts through highly symbolical gestures. Particularly in the scenes where Ming Ming's dreams bring her back to China after a lapse of a few years, it appears to be an enhanced one rather than a mere copy of what Huang calls "the Mei Lanfang technique."³⁴ The inner feelings of the heroine are intricate. She has been having an agonized inmost soul since she went to join her grandparents in America where she unexpectedly has had to forsake her life-long dream of singing and acting. To show this, Huang did not resort to the Stanislavskian principles of empathy and introspection or try to externalize those feelings of hers by following

³² Ding Luonan, "A Road to a Theatre of China's Own", *Drama*, 55 (1990), p.37. The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Bu jinjin jida di fengfu liao juben de ronglian, erqie yong xianming zhiguan de xingxiang, ba zhongxi wenhua de chongtu jieshi de linlijinzhi."

³³ *ibid.* The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Zuolin suo zhuiqiu de wutai huamian, wangwang bushi chuanfangwei de yibi yihua de bizheng xieshi, ershi juyou teshu yijing de, tuchu renwu de diaoshu gan."

³⁴ Huang Zuolin, "'China Dream': A Fruition of Global Interculturalism", in *The Dramatic Touch of Difference*, p.182

Brecht's theory of the alienation effect. Nor did he rely on Chinese operatic conventions, for these conventions might turn out to be a set of rigid clichés if poorly acted. Huang adopted a technique of dancing called *eukinetics*, by means of which "every part of the human body is to speak, not merely the tongue. The movement should be central, from the heart, rather than from the limbs, from the periphery."³⁵

In the rafting scene of the play where there were extensive movements based on *eukinetics*, Ming Ming and Zhi Qiang are caught up in a storm when steering a bamboo raft down the river and washed up on a deserted bank. As the drenched, freezing couple huddle together for warmth, they gradually fall in love with each other. Huang left his performers to improvise passions, which they did in a series of dances centred around a fire and a piece of white silk (i.e. the boy's belt which he takes off to cover the shivering girl). The white silk separating the two swirled and fluttered as the girl's shyness receded until they were intimately intertwined, their heads together with the boy running his index finger from Ming Ming's nose to her heart and then she doing the same to him. Huang believed that his technique was more effective than what he sneered as "the lip to lip monkey business of Hollywood."³⁶

Although Huang's *China Dream* was an enormous success,³⁷ some critics hold different opinions about it, mainly focusing on Huang's preoccupation with the projection of *Xieyi* features. Cai Yuzhi, for example, argues that "due to his *Xieyi* theory, Huang's play is conceptualized and results in shallow characterizations of

³⁵ *ibid.* Huang Zuolin claims to have learned it from a German dancer, Kurt Jooss, at Dartington Hall in Devon in 1936.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.183

³⁷ Staged over eighty times, it won the annual award of best drama bestowed by the Ministry of Culture. Xi Meijuan, the actress who played Ming Ming, and Ye Mang who played five roles of Zhi Qiang, Ming Ming's grandfather, John, Zhuangzi and an American surfing boy, both won the Plum Blossom Award, the top prize for actors, for the year of 1987.

stage figures."³⁸ To Cai, the play is overloaded with philosophical concepts. "Such a subject is too much for the characters and their stories to present," he says. "Stage images are overshadowed by ideological contents, which is taboo for art."³⁹ He regards the "shallow" characterizations of the five male figures, i.e. Zhi Qiang, John, Ming Ming's grandfather, Zhuangzi and a surfing boy, who are all played by one actor, as a result of Huang's "over-emphasis on the ideographics of life."⁴⁰

Leaving aside the ideological content of the play, whether or not Huang's treatment of the contemporary subject of cultural conflicts also belongs to the ephemeral genre of political drama in China is to be left for the future to decide. Huang chose to use only two actors, one male and one female, to act out all the dramatic personae in the play. This not only shows his intention to follow the minimization of characters typical of the traditional Chinese theatre to present a symbolic and poeticized life, but also reflects partly his response to Brecht's dramaturgy which he also wanted to incorporate.

In terms of acting, Huang seems to have been affected by Brecht in not encouraging the actor to be entirely converted into the role which he plays. Upon reading Brecht's "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting", Huang found himself in agreement with the German dramatist's ideas. Whereas Brecht points out that in the exhausting process of complete conversion, "the actor cannot usually manage to feel for very long on end that he really is the other person; he soon gets exhausted and

³⁸ Cai Yuzhi, "A Brief analysis of *China Dream*" ("Lue Lun Xieyi Huaju *Zhongguo Meng* Zhi Deshi"), *Theatre Studies (Xiju Yanjiu)*, 7 (1988), 72-75 (p.74). The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Bianju de xianyan, daozi liao juben de yinianhua he xingxiang de danbuo."

³⁹ *ibid*, p.75. The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Ju zhong de renwu he gushi fuzai bu liao zheyang yige chenzhong er duojie de zhuti. Sixiang da yu xingxiang, yishu zhi yi ji."

⁴⁰ *ibid*. Cai says: "To emphasise the ideographics of life, Ye Meng has had to play five different roles of different cultural and professional backgrounds, which is a great technical and physical difficulty for the actor." The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Weiliao qiangdiao shenghuo xieyixing, rang Ye Meng yiren biaoan wuge butong guodu, butong shengfen de jiaose. Zhe dui yanyuan laishuo shi jiqi jiannan de."

begins to copy various superficialities of the other person's speech and hearing,"⁴¹ Huang says that "the mysterious, completely unreserved conversion is indeed hard to achieve in reality. Therefore actors are not to be forced to do so."⁴² As Brecht noted, through Mei Lanfang's acting, that the Chinese performer "rejects complete conversion" and "limits himself from the start to simply quoting the character played,"⁴³ he was to respond to this particular acting technique with quotable *Gestus* as an innovation of his performance style. Huang Zuolin, on the other hand, reached back into his own native theatre tradition as a response to Brecht's dramaturgy. He was not content with echoing the latter's opinions.⁴⁴ He wanted to explore the possibilities of embodying these ideas by resorting to the *Xieyi* features of Chinese operas. He says: "To represent on stage life entirely as it is is impossible if not unpleasant. We should tell the audiences frankly that a play is just a play."⁴⁵

⁴¹ Bertolt Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting", in *Brecht on Theatre*, p.93

⁴² Huang Zuolin, "A Supplement to Brecht's 'Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting'" ("Bulaixite 'Zhongguo Xiju Yishu zhong de Moshenghua Xiaoguo' Du hou Buchong"), *Theatre Criticism (Xiju Luncong)*, 3 (1982), 17-26 (p.22). The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Nazhong shenmi de, haowu baoliu de zhuanhua, zai shishi shang queshi nanyi zuodao, yin'er haishi yi bubi mianweiqinan Weihao."

⁴³ Bertolt Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting", in *Brecht on Theatre*, p.94

⁴⁴ For example, Huang Zuolin expresses similar ideas with those of Brecht's when he says:

If actors and audiences are allowed to be carried away with dramatic events and characters' feelings, they will not be able to view the life and reality depicted in the play in a cool-minded, rational and scientific way, much less to reform the life and reality.

Huang Zuolin, "A Comparison between the Dramatic Conceptions of Mei Lanfang, Stanislavsky and Brecht", *People's Daily*, 12 August, 1981, p.3. The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

Ruguo yanyuan huo guanzhong guoyu chengzui zai juqing, renwu ganqing zhi zhong, tamen jiu bu nengguo lizhi di yi nengjing, kexue de tounao, qu renshi ju zhong de shenghuo he xianshi, gen tan bu shang gaizhao shenghuo, gaizhao xianshi.

⁴⁵ *ibid.* The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Ba shenghuo yuanfengbudong di ban shang wutai ruruo bushi keyan yeshi bu keneng di. Tanbai gaoshu guanzhong, yanxi bianshi yanxi."

It is not difficult to see that Huang did not aim for a psychological depiction of character, at least not by following the illusionistic tradition of naturalist theatre. The fact that Huang assigned five different roles to one actor suggests that he made an effort to endow his drama with the characteristic feature of theatricality or fictionality of operas. The lives of the characters were sublimated, and expressed through dances and gestures. The stylized or "eurhythmicized" improvisation techniques reinforce this point.

In terms of Huang's incorporation of elements of Brechtian theatre, *China Dream* is not to be seen as a play based solely on the *Xieyi* dramatic conceptions. It is to be seen as an example of a theatre engaged in cross-cultural exchange which integrates disparate theatre traditions of both East and West.

Wolfram Schlenker asserts:

At the moment Brecht's interest in Eastern theatre seems to play more of a negative role in China since he is used as the main witness for the possibility of uniting Chinese Opera and European theatre to form a new national Chinese theatre - ideas which like a phantom have been haunting discussions for a long time but which have not yet really materialized in any practical form.⁴⁶

Huang's production of *China Dream* had not happened when Schlenker was writing his article. Since not much corroborative evidence can be found in Huang's early experimental plays, Schlenker seems to have had good reason to suggest that such an idea was phantom-like. Yet his comment on Brecht's role as negative is rather mistaken, for not only almost all of Huang's early experimental dramas can be seen as modelled upon Brecht's epic theatre, one way or another,⁴⁷ his idea of *Xieyi* drama was also initiated by Brecht.

⁴⁶ Wolfram Schlenker, "Brecht in Asia - The Chinese Contribution", in *Brecht and East Asian Theatre*, pp.186-207

⁴⁷ Chen Daming, for example, sees almost all the plays through which Huang carried out his experiments of his *Xieyi* dramatic conceptions as epic drama and tries to call critics' attention to this

In Winter, 1936, while Huang was studying drama at Cambridge, he came across Brecht's essay "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting". Upon reading it, Huang felt that his national pride had been greatly enhanced, because a Western dramatist of some repute at the time "expressed his sincere admiration for Mei's performing art, and believed meanwhile that he had found some evidence for the stagecraft which he had been groping for."⁴⁸ "The idea of 'Xieyi dramatic conceptions' welled up spontaneously in my mind," Huang recalled nearly half a century later.⁴⁹

Huang's first stage production after the establishment of the People's Republic of China was initiated by the Brechtian principles of epic drama. As briefly mentioned in Chapter IV, when a group of script writers of the Shanghai People's Arts Theatre in late 1950 were facing difficulties with their work making propaganda for the Resist-U.S.-and-Assist-Korea Campaign,⁵⁰ Huang, then the deputy head of the theatre, gave his famous five-hour marathon talk in Guangzhou in January, 1951, comparing the epic form of Brechtian drama with that of the traditional Chinese theatre. Brecht's epic drama provided the theoretical foundations for the loosely

important fact. See Chen Daming, "My Understanding of the *Xieyi* Dramatic Conceptions" ("Wode Lijie he Yidian"), *Theatre Arts (Xiju Yishu)*, 26 (1984), 14-16 (pp.14-15)

Adrian Hsia, too, cites the first four experimental plays of Huang's *Xieyi* theatre as steps towards an epic theatre particularly in connection with Brecht's influence in China. See Adrian Hsia, "Bertolt Brecht in China and His Impact", *Comparative Literature Studies*, 20 (1983), pp.232-240

⁴⁸ Huang Zuolin, "A Supplement to Brecht's 'Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting'", *Theatre Criticism*, 3 (1982), p.13. The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Ta dui Mei xiansheng de biao yan yishu biao shi liao you zhong de zan shang; tong shi, ta ren wei zi ji suo meng long zhui qiu de xiju yishu, zai zhong guo gu dian xiqu zhong de dao liao muxie yin zheng."

⁴⁹ Huang Zuolin, *My Xieyi Dramatic Conceptions*, p.3. The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Wode 'xiyi xijuguan' bian youran'ersheng liao."

⁵⁰ At that time, spoken drama in China was still strongly dominated by Aristotelian norms, especially where playwriting was concerned. Plays were divided into four or five acts, observing the three unities. The group of people who worked on the playtext for *The Living Newspaper of the Resist-U.S.-and-Assist-Korea Campaign* had difficulties using stories which stretched over half a century. See Huang Zuolin, *My Xieyi Dramatic Conceptions*, p.476; and also Adrian Hsia, "Bertolt Brecht in China and His Impact", *Comparative Literature Studies* 20 (1983), pp.231-233

constructed play of fifty scenes. Even if Huang later brushed away the play, together with *Eight Red Flags Are Fluttering* and *Brave the Current*, as "a coarse production of a shallow playtext," he admitted it as "the first step towards my *Xieyi* dramatic conceptions."⁵¹

Brechtian principles of epic drama appear to have served as the starting point of his experimentations with *Xieyi* theatre. Following his second, unsuccessful experiment in *Eight Red Flags Are Fluttering* in 1958, a hastily team-written propaganda play about the Great Leap Forward Movement which consisted of eight "flexibly" connected short plays, Huang Zuolin directed Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* in 1959. As mentioned earlier in Chapter IV, during the rehearsals, Huang delivered a speech to his co-workers exclusively about Brecht, in which he gave a more detailed account than he did in 1951 in his Guangzhou marathon talk. There was also an explanation of Brecht's alienation effect, which he translated as "techniques to eliminate life illusions," believing it to be "more to the point and easier to understand."⁵² In the concluding part of the speech, he raised the question about what the Chinese could learn from Brecht. To Huang's mind, the relatively close relationship between Brecht and the traditional Chinese theatre might be able to offer some enlightenment for the country's modern spoken theatre:

I always wanted to write an article, entitled "Mei Lanfang, Stanislavsky and Brecht". Looked at superficially, these three great theatre masters seem to have many differences from each other, with particularly Mei Lanfang and Stanislavsky standing at two extreme ends: one for the conventionalities and the other for the inner experiences and reproduction of real life. Brecht seems to stand in between them. If we pay no attention to him when learning from

⁵¹ Huang Zuolin, *My Xieyi Dramatic Conceptions*, p.276. The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Yanchu shi cucao de, juben shi qianlou de. [...] Wei wode xieyi xijuguan maichu liao diyi bu."

⁵² Huang Zuolin, "On the German Dramatist Brecht" ("Guanyu Deguo Xiju Yishujia Bulaixite"), in *On the Art of Brechtian Theatre*, pp.1-21 (p.12). The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Ruguo women jiang ta yicheng 'puochu shenghuo huanjue de jiqiao' keneng bijiao zhijieliadang, rongyi lijie, zhishao ta neng mingque wenti."

Stanislavsky, we will tend to be too naturalistic (showing misunderstanding of how to reproduce real life on stage); if we only stress the importance of drum beats and verse recitations when learning from our national theatre, we could do no better than the very form of traditional drama itself. This makes me think of Brecht. Could we receive some enlightenment from him?⁵³

While he was introducing Brechtian theatre, Huang also experimented with the traditional form of Chinese operatic arts in spoken drama. This provided him with firsthand experience with the aesthetics and techniques of Chinese operas indispensable for his *Xieyi* dramatic conceptions. In the early 1960s he began to stage traditional Chinese dramas such as *Fiancée-Leasing* (1961), *Storming the City Temple* (*Da Chenghuang*, 1962), *Storming the Bean Curd* (*Da Doufu*, 1962) and *Storming the Bride* (*Da Xinni*, 1962). Huang saw to it that the playtexts remained more or less unchanged, with only the songs rendered into free verse. The conventional techniques such as self-introduction, soliloquies and asides were still adopted. The stage design as well as the costumes typical of Chinese operas were preserved. Yet he reduced the number of actors or actresses to a minimum, who often played a double role as both storyteller and character portrayed. Occasionally musicians from Chinese operas were also invited to work with his actors.⁵⁴ *Fiancée-Leasing* is a typical example. Huang used only four actors in his adaptation, with self-introductions or soliloquies in verse instead of songs, on a bare stage where they were separated by imaginative gates of walls. This kind of free operatic construction of

⁵³ *ibid*, p.19. The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

Wo chang xiang xie yipian wenzhang, timing wei "Mei Lanfang, Sitannisilafusiji, Bulaixite". Biaomian kanlai, zhe sanwei xiju dashi shifu gegeburu, er sitannisilafusiji yu mei lanfang youqi zhanzai liange jiduan: yige jiang neixin tiyan, shenghuohua; yige jiangjiu chenshihua; er bulaixite shihu zhanzai lianzhe de zhongjian. Xuexi sitannisilafusiji ruguo xue bu dao jia, keneng chansheng ziranzhuyi qingxiang (dui shenghuohua wujie); xuexi minzhu xiqu chuantong shang zhi fazhan jia luogudian, shuo yunbai, zai hao ye hao buguo chuantong xiqu, zhe shi wo xiangdao bulaixite, cong ta zheli shifuo keneng dedao qifa?"

⁵⁴ For more information, see Ding Luonan, "Creating a New Style of China's Own Spoken Theatre" ("Goujian Zhongguo Shi Huaju de Xin Geju"), in *Zuolin Studies*, pp.90-131 (p.104)

time and space and sculpturality of characterization were to be felt in many of his later productions of spoken drama.

These plays, all comedies or melodramas, were very popular at the time, and some of them still remain in the repertoire of the Shanghai People's Arts Theatre. These experiments can be seen as part of Huang's effort to look for ways of integrating Western-type spoken drama with elements of the traditional Chinese theatre. He was not seeking novelty, nor was it his intention to enrich his repertoire of spoken plays with borrowed items from traditional operas. By putting traditional Chinese dramas on the stage of spoken theatre, Huang was reaching back into his own national traditions to create his dramaturgy of *Xieyi* theatre.⁵⁵

However, unlike Brecht who openly acknowledged his indebtedness to Chinese acting in his writings, Huang did not seem to like the idea of being thought of as influenced by the German dramatist, despite the suggestions in his works and

⁵⁵ Chen Daming says:

I even believe that, without the transplantations of traditional comedies like *Fiancée-Leasing*, *Storming the City Temple*, *Storming the Bean Curd*, and *Storming the Bride*, which were experimentations with techniques of the traditional theatre language such as soliloquies, asides and verse recitations in spoken theatre, it would have been very difficult to retain the harmony of the verse-like, ideographical dialogues in the epic drama *Life, Freedom and Love* later. Likewise, if the actors of spoken theatre had not acted amidst drum beats and clankings of gongs in the above comedies, the ideographics of movement, which is called *eukinetics*, would not have been successfully represented in *China Dream* now.

Chen Daming, "Zuolin's Comedies" ("Zuolin Xiju Shijian Qianxi"), in *Zuolin Studies*, pp.316-332 (p.331). The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

Wo shenzhe renwei, ruguo meiyou *Jie Qi*, *Da Chenghuang*, *Da Doufu*, *Da Xinnian* deng xiqu chuantong xiju de yizhi, jiang "dubai," "pangbai," "shuban" deng taici chuli fangshi rongru huaju biaoyan de changshi, kongpa rihou ye nanyi zai peiyan shishiju *Shengming*, *Ziyou yu Aiqing* shi, jiang sanwenshi shi de xieyixing taizi ruci tuotie di guanchuan chuangu. Tongyang, ruguo bushi dangchu zai shangshu jige chuantong xiao xiju zhong, jiu kaishi changshi rang hauju yanyuan jiuzhe "luogujing" biaoyan, ye bu keneng yicu'erjiu di chansheng jintian zai *Zhongguo Meng* zhong pei chengwei "youdongxue" de dongzuo xieyixing.

writings. As early as 1961 he solemnly declared that he was not "Brecht's disciple."⁵⁶ In a private talk with me in February, 1993, when I asked him whether he received any impetus from Brecht in the construction of his *Xieyi* theatre, he categorically denied it, saying that it had always been an idea of his own.⁵⁷ This also reminds us of Brecht who would argue that he had already fully developed his idea of the alienation effect prior to his contact with Mei Lanfang's acting.

However, Huang's denial of Brecht's influence also seems partly truthful, especially when we take into account his effort in integrating Stanislavsky at the same time he adopted Brechtian dramaturgy. This was not a concession made to the prevailing Stanislavskian tradition in modern Chinese theatre, but is to be seen as an exploration of the possibility of integrating more disparate theatre traditions, or in Huang's own words, to achieve "a fruition of global interculturalism."⁵⁸ Although part of his understanding of Stanislavsky seemed to be one-sided, Huang displayed a scientific approach by comparing him with Mei Lanfang and Brecht.

Huang started his comparison by first looking at the common ground. He believed that they all held serious, progressive artistic views of drama based on realism. It would be wrong to entirely separate the three from each other. However, where their dramatic conceptions are concerned, the three show remarkable differences from each other. Huang summarizes:

What are the differences of Mei Lanfang, Stanislavsky and Brecht from each other? To be precise, their fundamental differences lie in the fact that Stanislavsky believed in the existence of the fourth wall, Brecht wanted to pull it down, and Mei Lanfang did not have to pull it down at all as it never existed for him. This is because the traditional

⁵⁶ Huang Zuolin, "Random Talks on 'Dramatic Conceptions'", *People's Daily*, 25 April 1962, p.3. The original passage is: "Bizu shengming wo bingfi bushi de xingtu."

⁵⁷ Arranged by his secretary, Mr Li, my interview with Huang Zuolin was conducted at his home on 13 February, 1993. The conversation, which lasted about forty minutes, twice more than the time I was given by his secretary, was recorded on tape.

⁵⁸ This appears in the title of his article "'China Dream': A Fruition of Global Interculturalism". See *The Dramatic Touch of Difference*, p.169

Chinese theatre is always highly conventionalized, which never creates any life illusions for the audience.⁵⁹

It follows from Huang that the *Xiayi* features of Chinese drama which distinguish it from Stanislavsky and Brecht relate to the idea of the fourth wall or the creation of life illusions. This may seem to be a good point to start with. Yet at the same time it makes us wonder why there should be a common belief in China, typically represented by Huang's ideas, that Stanislavskian theatre is dominated by the concept of the fourth wall. We might as well argue that the fourth wall concept developed by Antoine in the second half of the nineteenth century had nothing to do with Stanislavsky's method, because his theatre experimentations led to his search for inner or psychological realism rather than an emphasis on external or photographic realism, which broke the convention of the picture-frame stage of the illusionist theatre striving for authentic, historic accuracy. The Method of Physical Actions, for example, which Stanislavsky devised in the late years of his career, was almost a total reversal of his early belief in an actor's forcing and experiencing an emotion of the character portrayed on stage, using methods such as "concentration of attention," "relaxation," "sense memory," "emotional memory" or "Magic If." This method required an actor to go on stage without trying to force an emotion. Instead his responsibility was to fulfil a simple, concrete, purposeful physical action. He investigated the play through improvisations, i.e. the character's behaviour. In the improvisations, the actor's mind, his senses, his intuition, the muscles of his body, his whole psychological and physical nature participated. Actors trained in this way were

⁵⁹ Huang Zuolin, "A Comparison of the Dramatic Conceptions of Mei Lanfang, Stanislavsky and Brecht", *People's Daily*, 12 August 1981, p.3. The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

Mei, si, bu sanwei de qubie jiu jin hezai? Jiandan eyao di shuo, zhui genben de qubie shi: Sitannilafusiji xiangxin disiduqian, bulaixite yao tuifan zhe du qian, er duiyu mei lanfang, zhe du qian genben jiu bu chunzai, yong bu zhao tuifan. Zhe shi yinwei zhongguo chuantong xiju yixiang juyou gaodu de guifanhua, conglai buhui gi guanzhong zhaocheng zhenshi de shenghuo huanjue.

supposed to reject clichés and concentrate on the revelation of the individual psychology of the character; this technique would bring them to the birth of an organically functioning character on stage.⁶⁰

However, as Sonia Moore points out,

American, European, and indeed Russian theatre experts have been acquainted with Stanislavsky's work at different stages of its development. The theatre leader who became acquainted with Stanislavsky's teachings when he was working on relaxation was absolutely certain that the secret to the "system" was relaxation. Another, who became acquainted with Stanislavsky during his imagination period, went home to teach "imagination" as the magic key to the Stanislavsky System. And the one who learned about Stanislavsky's use of the emotional memory thought that he knew the system's full and true nature.⁶¹

Although research is yet to be done in China as to what particular stages of Stanislavsky's developmental theory were introduced and accepted by modern Chinese theatre practitioners, judging from conventional practice of Chinese spoken drama to present realistic characters in realistic circumstances, we can conclude that it is not his technique of Physical Actions that the Chinese have been acquainted with. The Stanislavskian system was first introduced into China while the Communist Party was fighting against the Japanese and the Kuomintang Government in the 1940s to help with its instigational theatre activities, and then, after the People's Republic was established, to help cultivate its propagandistic theatre and drama schools. All the techniques involved in urging an actor to experience an emotion to arouse empathetical feelings among the audience would be regarded as genuinely Stanislavskian.

In order to prevent people from understanding his theory and practice one-sidedly, Stanislavsky points out:

⁶⁰ See Sonia Moore, *Stanislavsky Revealed: The Actor's Guide to Spontaneity on Stage* (New York: Applause Theatre Books, 1991), pp.6-8

⁶¹ *ibid*, pp.4-5

There was an opinion extant at that time, an opinion which it is impossible to overthrow, that our theatre was a realistic theatre only, [...] and yet [...] who was it who was really interested in the quest for and creation of the abstract? But once an idea gets lodged in the mind of the public it is hard to dislodge it.⁶²

Unfortunately, the success of the Moscow Art Theatre with its realistic productions was to dog its reputation for many years, and the association of his relations with illusionist theatre was lodged in the minds of Chinese theatre practitioners for a long time.

Although Huang was to realize this many years later,⁶³ during the long process of creating his *Xieyi* drama, he always referred to Stanislavsky as an illusionist. In his article about his *Xieyi* drama *China Dream* collected in Erika Fischer-Lichte's *Dramatic Touch of Difference* (1990) he still cites the example of how Stanislavsky produced *Othello*, which he first used at the 1962 National Symposium of Spoken Drama and Opera Writing in Guangzhou,⁶⁴ to compare Brecht's observation of Mei Lanfang's acting of the boat scene in *The Fisherman's Revenge*. His impression of Stanislavsky's illusionistic treatment of the Venetian gondola was lodged in his mind as follows:

Wheels thickly encased in rubber fitted under the gondola to make it move smoothly; the gondola was pushed by twelve men; sacking blown by fans was used to make waves; Stanislavsky also gave detailed instructions regarding the oars, which were made of tin, hollowed out inside and half-filled with water, to produce the sound of splashing so typical of Venice.⁶⁵

⁶² Quoted from James Roose-Evans, *Experimental Theatre*, p.19

⁶³ During my interview with him, Huang also told me that the Stanislavskian system had not been comprehensively studied in China and that he was trying to establish a Stanislavsky centre in Shanghai. See note 57 above

⁶⁴ See Huang Zuolin, "Random Talks on 'Dramatic Conceptions'", *People's Daily*, 25 April, 1962, p.3

⁶⁵ Huang Zuolin, "'China Dream': A Fruition of Global Interculturalism", in *The Dramatic Touch of Difference*, p.184

In terms of the fourth wall, which Huang used as the starting point in his comparison between Mei Lanfang, Brecht and Stanislavsky, Brecht's ideas were quite different. Huang thinks of the fundamental features of his theories as "his advocacy of a certain distance maintained between the actor and the character portrayed, between the audience and the actor, and between the audience and the character."⁶⁶ Brecht formed his ideas according to the particular situation of the decaying capitalist theatre of Western Europe in the wake of the first world war. "While the decadent dramatic conceptions tried to involve the spectator with the stage events to exhaust him and to demobilize his will to react," Huang explains, "Brecht believed in changing the spectator into an observer, awakening his courage and will to react."⁶⁷ In other words, what Brecht needed was a new theatre, an intellectual, dialectical, and instructional theatre. And the main method which he employed to break down life illusions was estrangement, or alienation effect.

By this Huang pointed out what he saw as the basic difference between the Stanislavskian system and that of Brecht. Then he turned back to Mei Lanfang:

Traditional Chinese dramatists fully believe in the hypothetical nature of theatre arts, frankly admitting that we are acting on stage. Just as many of the theatre artists of elder generations used to say that plays are mere hypotheses which you can interpret as either true or not true, stage actings are a kind of activities which are not true but seemingly true of real life. Stage events, with their origins in real life, though, are not minutely detailed reproductions of those that happen or have happened in real life. Therefore, although they also pay attention to

⁶⁶ Huang Zuolin, "A Comparison of the Dramatic Conceptions of Mei Lanfang, Stanislavsky and Brecht", *People's Daily*, 12 August, 1981, p.3. The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Ta zhuzhang yanyuan he jiaose zhijian, guanzhong he yanyuan zhijian, guanzhong he jiaose zhijian bixu baochi yiding de juli."

⁶⁷ Huang Zuolin, "Random Talks on 'Dramatic Conceptions'", *People's Daily*, 25 April, 1962, p.3. The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Tuifipai xiju zhuzhang ba guanzhong juanru shijian zhong qu, xiaohao tade jingli, shuaitui tade xingdong yizhi; bulaixite que zhuzhang ba guanzhong biancheng guanchajia, huanxing tade yili, zhudongxing."

emotion and reason as logical of real life, they never try to create stage illusions closely linked with reality.⁶⁸

Such a general principle of the traditional Chinese theatre determines the fact that it is anti-illusionistic and its actors always keep an obvious distance between themselves and the characters portrayed. Brecht saw it as supporting evidence for his idea of the alienation effect. Yet such an alienation effect is not at all a conscious effort aiming at an estrangement of feelings. Instead, Chinese acting focuses on the harmony between emotion and reason to provide enjoyment of a synthesized beauty in the very form of drama itself. As Li Zehou concludes about the traditional Chinese theatre,

This is a kind of highly refined, sublimated beauty. Tremendously polished musical compositions, every single act of raising the hands or moving the feet as part of the conventionalized, dance-like movements, poses delivered in the fashion of sculptures, symbolical and suppositional setting, extremely concise expositions of forthcoming plots, carefully chosen dramatic conflicts (often those ethical ones causing great mental responses), [...] all combine to make a perfect harmony between the content and form of the play, particularly projecting the beauty of form as required by the content.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Huang Zuolin, "A Supplement to Brecht's 'Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting'", *Theatre Criticism*, 3 (1982), p.12. The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

Zhongguo xiqu chongfen kending wutai yishu de jiadingxing, tanshuai chengren women shi zai yanxi. Qia ru woguo xuduo lao yi bei xiqu yishujia chang shuo de 'xu ge zuo xi, zheng jia yi ren,' ji, yanxi shi yizhong jia er shi zheng de huodong. Wutai shang chuxian de shiwu, shuiran yuan yu shenghuo, bingfi zhengshi shenghuo de fanban; shuiran zhongshi fuhe shenghuo luoji de "qing" yu "li", dan que bu zhuiqiu gushi shenghuo de wutai huanjue.

⁶⁹ Li Zehou, *The Journey of Beauty (Mei de Licheng)* (Beijing: Wenwu, 1981), p.192. The writer's own translation. The original passage is as follows:

Zhe shi yizhong jingguo gaodu tilian de mei de jinghua. Qianchubailian de changqiang sheji, yi jushou yi touzu de wudaohua de chenshi dongzuo, diaosuxing de lianxiang, xiangzhengxing, shiyixing de huanjing buzhi, yichang jianjiemingliao de qingjie jiaodai, gaodu xuanze de xiju chongtu (jinchang shi neng jiqi juda xinli fanxiang de lunli chongtu) [...] shi leirong he xingshi jiaorong wujian, er tebie tuchu liao jiding liao leirong yaoqiu de xingshi mei.

As Huang's motivation for comparing the systems of Mei Lanfang, Stanislavsky and Brecht was to advocate *Xieyi* theatre, the above short account of his comparison actually brings us close to a definition of the basic outline of his *Xieyi* dramatic conceptions. It has much to do with the concept of the hypothetical nature of the theatre. The Stanislavskian system disregards it, trying to truthfully reproduce social life on stage so as to create illusions involving the audience; Brechtian theatre purposefully emphasizes it, vastly adopting techniques of the alienation effect in a basically realistic reproduction of social events so as to make the audience think; and Huang's *Xieyi* theatre, heavily based on the Chinese theatre tradition while trying to incorporate in itself certain features of the former two schools at the same time, makes full use of it to produce a kind of enhanced, refined, and sublimated life which has its origin in society but is not a realistic reproduction. As he says determinedly, his theatre should produce artistry which is "much higher, more drastic, concentrated, typical and ideal than ordinary real life. Hence more universal."⁷⁰ This is perhaps his conjecture of "global interculturalism."

In conclusion, although, sadly, Huang is not able to experiment with more *Xieyi* dramas as he has taken semi-retirement due to his age (he was born in 1906) and declining health since the end of the 1980s. *China Dream*, as the first, but not the last by any means, piece designated as a *Xieyi* play, shows itself as an instance of the increasing trend of cross-cultural interactions that are also taking place inside China. In such a trend, Brecht is to be seen as an important figure. If Brecht's understanding of the traditional Chinese theatre contributed to some significant aspects of his theory and practice of epic drama, he also prompted Chinese theatre practitioners to commit themselves to innovating modern Chinese spoken drama and to the study of their cultural heritage. Huang Zuolin was inspired by him to re-examine systematically

⁷⁰ Huang Zuolin, *My Xieyi Dramatic Conceptions*, p.477. The writer's own translation. The original passage is: "Bi putong de shiji shenghuo geng gao, geng jilie, geng you jizhongxing, geng dianxing, geng lixiang, yinci jiu geng dai pupianxing."

China's native theatre tradition from a theoretical point of view, which, apart from raising the level of people's appreciation of the whole dramaturgy of opera and of its unique style, led to fundamental aesthetic-theatrical changes in China's spoken theatre as represented by his new theatre style of synthesizing disparate theatre traditions. In Huang's hands, Brecht's theatre has become a means of uniting the two distinctively different forms of Chinese theatre, the traditional and the modern, or the old and the new.

Conclusion

By using the metaphor of "a theatre of feast," Leonard Cabell Pronko argues that the classical theatre tradition in the East and West is "both realistic and theatricalized, both illusionistic and presentational" to please both the senses and the minds of the audience.¹ A re-creation, not imitation, of Occidental parallels with Oriental classical forms in a cross-cultural contact, he suggests, "might result in a renaissance like the one brought about by the rediscovery of another literature in Western Europe three or four hundred years ago."² Although he seems mistaken in asserting that Chinese theatre is also realistic and illusionistic, Pronko does not sound over optimistic in hoping for a universal cultural revival brought forth by the contact of remote theatre traditions. This is likely, as cross-cultural theatre interactions have been taking place increasingly, in contrast to the concept of theatre heritage as something exclusively indigenous.

As is noted by Erika Fischer-Lichte and others, there has been an increasing trend shared by theatres of widely differing cultures in the present world to transplant elements of foreign theatre traditions into native production.³ Recent examples of such activities can be found in both East and West. Western theatre practitioners such as Ariane Mnouchkine, Robert Wilson, Peter Brook, and Eugenio Barba have made respective or combined use of elements of Eastern, African or Persian theatre arts which include the traditional forms of Japanese theatre, Peking Opera, Indian *orissi*

¹ He says: "The theatre [...] treats that invisible world (as well as multiple facets of the visible, palpable, audible one) in a total way that makes of it a feast---a feast the audience enjoys on most occasions. [...] It is a theatre of the inner eye and of the outer eyes at the same time. Like our great theatres of the past, it is both realistic and theatricalized, both illusionistic and presentational." Leonard Cabell Pronko, *Theatre East and West*, pp.1-2

² *ibid*, p.5

³ Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Theatre, Own and Foreign: The Intercultural Trend in Contemporary Theatre", in *The Dramatic Touch of Difference*, p.11

dance, Balinese *barong*, etc. In Asian and Latin American countries, Western dramas, principally Shakespeare, Molière and Brecht, have been staged in regional theatre forms such as the dance theatre of *kathakali* in India, *kabuki* in Japan and local operas in China.⁴

The phenomenon of cultural transfer rendered by such kind of theatre activities in appropriating or fusing two or even more differing cultural traditions for the creation of a third appears to designate a shifting or circulating pattern of cultural transference which allows the "minor" culture an impact on the dominant one. Because of this, cultures are no longer locked into binaries. The polarities of "emitter" and "receiver" disappear or become joint, as the "major" culture and the "minor" culture both serve as the "emitter" and "receiver" at the same time.

The phenomenon of the two-way flow of cultural transference, furthermore, prompts us to re-define the concept of one's native theatre tradition no longer as an exclusive, prized historical heritage. If, according to Ton de Leeuw, theatre tradition can be defined as "the sum of cultural values handed down from the past, and our interpretation of these values,"⁵ it is by no means a static thing. The values of the past function only as they have been filtered through our contemporary consciousness. The

⁴ Apart from these recent examples, Erika Fischer-Lichte also cites the early examples starting from around the beginning of the twentieth century when, reacting against the literary, psychological realistic theatre of illusion, Edward Gordon Craig, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Alexander Tairov, Antonin Artaud, Max Reinhardt, Bertolt Brecht, and others, based their ideas of a non-literary theatre on Japanese, Chinese, Balinese and Indian theatre conventions, directly affecting the status of the literary text and language, performance style, conceptions of space and the quality of audience perception. See *ibid*, pp.12-13

Carl Weber tries to illustrate the long history of transferring plays from one culture to another by looking at the whole Western theatre starting from the Roman adaptation of Greek drama down to the early part of the present century when Ibsen's dramaturgy of realism as well as Stanislavsky's system became the structure of choice for many playwrights and theatre directors in the West. See Carl Weber, "AC/TC: Currents of Theatrical Exchange", in *Interculturalism & Performance*, pp.31-32

⁵ Ton de Leeuw, "Interaction of Cultures in Contemporary Music", *Cultures*, 1 (1974), 13-32 (p.13). Leeuw's ideas about music exchange in the contemporary world, which I have borrowed, equally apply to the concept of disparate theatre traditions under revision.

notion of theatre tradition, therefore, is as dynamic as it is essentially subjective. On the other hand, being part of human culture, theatre tradition is *shared* knowledge. With the advance of the twentieth century, theatre traditions have become less localized. Interactions on an international scale have been on the increase. Theatre practice has become less exclusively conditioned by local or regional values. We are all subject to common influences, such as the technological, industrial and urbanized environment of modern society. This also applies to world drama: we all share the common heritage of the major currents of thought which have influenced theatre. The factors which condition drama are therefore more uniform throughout the world today than formerly.

The field of theatre activities is widening. Works are being brought into existence, with a conscious use of the most heterogeneous materials and resources from all corners of the world, making a fruitful cross-cultural exchange among widely different theatre traditions more possible. It is relatively safe for us to say that local traditions now exist as part of a world-wide tradition.

Foundations have been laid for a positive eclectic integration of elements of disparate theatre traditions. The anomaly inherent in this is that the transposition of what is apparently a foreign theatre tradition may sometimes result in the dissolution, to some degree, of one's native theatre culture. For instance, traditional operas were renounced in China in the early decades of the twentieth century when Western-type spoken drama was first introduced as a weapon against feudalism and capitalism, and Madame Mao imposed her modern revolutionary model operas during the Great Cultural Revolution, which smothered the activities of other forms of traditional theatre.⁶

The contact between the foreign and native theatre traditions may effect changes in methods of approach to dramatic productions, and it may further effect socio-cultural developments. The specific values in the evolution of an art, those

⁶ See Chapter V, notes 47, 51 & 52

which are rooted in the past, cannot be re-lived. It is impossible to re-live the past. It can only be reconstructed, or preserved, as it is, perhaps. And it is the relative values, the ones that have been derived and interpreted through contemporary consciousness, that, in the last resort, are the most authentic and will prove most fruitful. Thus, an equilibrium between the past and the present, the foreign and the native, an adaptation of old to new and of new to old, of the foreign to the native, is to be sought, in the light of aesthetic-historical and socio-cultural conditions of mutually participating theatre traditions.

The shifting or circulating pattern of cross-cultural relations between Brecht and China represents a complex process of cultural participation of the theatre in producing, transforming and conserving theatre traditions. Both Brecht and his advocates in China participated in this cultural process with an equal determination to establish a distinctive identity for their respective theatres. The roles they played correlate with their individual socio-cultural as well as professional backgrounds. The efforts they made resulted in a cultural transformation of theatre traditions which created two theatres reminiscent of each other by borrowing each other's dramaturgy, yet still with a style independent of each other.

Aiming at deliberately breaking the dramatic illusion of his time, Brecht reconstructed the "mainstream of European classical tradition" by making use of a kind of theatricalism, long forgotten in the West after the Greeks and the Elizabethans, but rekindled by the classical Chinese theatre's hypothetical or symbolical way of presenting life on stage. The main emphasis of the classical Chinese theatre tradition lies in an aesthetic experience, enabled by the creation of an aesthetic time and space in which actual everyday gestures, rhythm and tempo do not apply. Its aesthetically sophisticated form, plus its stylized gestural conventions, presupposes that an awareness of reality in the theatre becomes entirely a matter of mind and imagination of the audience and the actor. While Brecht endeavoured to separate life and art, stage and reality, contriving to make the audience aware of the theatricality of his epic drama, he encountered Chinese acting which raised him to a

theoretically conscious level about his ideas of an alienating or estranging style which he may have already started to practise. His conviction of taking the theatre in the direction of conscious theatricality was consolidated. If *Verfremdung* meant "making strange," Brecht learnt from the symbolism, suggestiveness, and stylization of Mei Lanfang's art that it was possible to make it graceful and popular as well. By responding to Chinese dramaturgy, Brecht wanted his audience to feel the same relationship to his drama which men felt towards the epic recited to them in the halls ages ago, or which the Chinese used to feel towards extracts of operas inside noisy temple courtyards or tea-houses.

Although the Chinese introduction of Brecht had much to do with general dissatisfaction over the quality of political drama, the cultural transformation of contemporary performing arts in China was an aesthetic-theatrical change as much as a socio-cultural change. Yet during such an intricate process where several theatre traditions were brought together to test and re-think each other's values, to produce and conserve a distinctive identity of a modern theatre of China's own was a clearly conscious effort. Huang, one of the Chinese theatre practitioners who made such a conscious effort with a certain degree of success, was prompted by Brechtian theatre to reach back into China's own culture for a modified or re-defined theatre aesthetic. Although one might also be tempted to argue that Huang's *Xieyi* drama was the product of Western influence, with regard to the obvious Brechtian and Stanislavskian elements which he sought to integrate, his new theatre style was indigenously Chinese. This very Chineseness can be viewed as part of his intention to rescue modern Chinese theatre from being over influenced by its Western counterparts. His return to his own theatre tradition was in fact a re-constructive return to the Chineseness of a theatre which is distinguished by its poetic and symbolic style. Huang was only inspired by Brecht to find things new for what was originally a Western theatre tradition, to unite the two distinctively different theatre traditions, by reaching back into the Chinese theatre heritage that had been shared by Brecht many decades before.

Despite the constraints under which both men worked, namely, the Nazis and the Great Cultural Revolution, that tried to silence them both, Brecht and Huang were fortunate enough to live in a time and place which enabled them to embrace simultaneously their own cultural traditions and a foreign theatre aesthetic which were subject to processes of transference and transformation. Both of them benefited from both traditions, the East and the West, and shared the same historical heritages, the ancient and the modern. By borrowing extensively from different theatre traditions, Brecht and Huang were not merely mediating between their own cultures and those of the foreign sources they were adopting and adapting. They were in search of a new theatre. They exploited theatre traditions, foreign and own, old and new, in order to accomplish their own contemporary purposes, to achieve an avant-garde theatre style which, apart from reflecting the common features of these disparate theatre traditions, would help to re-create a classical tradition that was either long forgotten or greatly damaged. Such cross-cultural interactions demonstrate that a new fruitful theatre can be established by creative integration of elements from different cultural sources. My examination of the mutual effect which both Brecht and Chinese theatre had upon each other in terms of socio-cultural as well as aesthetic-theatrical changes involved may, I hope, contribute to the studies of cultural transfer in the history of theatre.

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